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The Ring

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Win, lose or draw, it's never easy sharing the ring with light heavyweight veteran Isaac Chilemba. Just ask Sergey Kovalev, Tony Bellew and Eleider Alvarez. Chilemba was his usual awkwardly stubborn self against ballyhooed WBA beltholder Dmitry Bivol, who was taken the 12-round distance on August 4 in Atlantic City.

MATTHEW HEASLEY

HEAVIER HANDS?

Can one boxer use 8-ounce gloves and another use 10-ounce gloves during the same fight? In the Joseph Diaz-Jesus Rojas fight it seemed that the gloves were not the same size. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each boxing gloves weight? Also, what are the gloves made of, inside and outside?

Mario Carpentier
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Quality modern boxing gloves are made of leather (usually cowhide or goatskin) and waterproof linings (usually nylon) on the outside and filled with latex foam. Traditionally, boxing gloves were filled with horsehair padding, and some specialty gloves used today are filled with a combination of foam and horsehair.

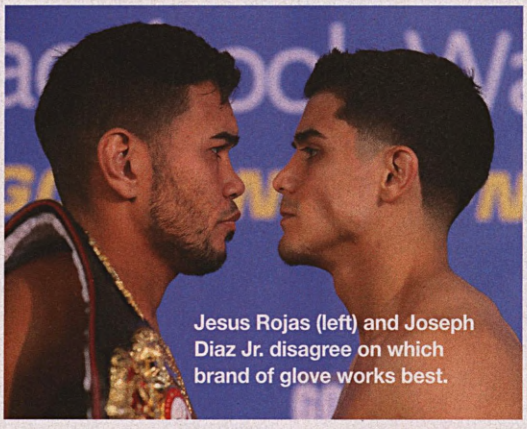
Boxers cannot use different sized gloves in a fight. Boxers at the welterweight limit (147 pounds) or lighter wear 8-ounce gloves. Boxers heavier than welterweight wear 10-ounce gloves (except in Nevada, where lightweights and under wear 8-ounce gloves). The Rojas-Diaz fight was under 147 pounds, so they both wore 8-ounce gloves. Diaz's gloves looked bigger for two reasons: He wore a different brand than Rojas (the Everlast MX) and his were white, which often look bigger on TV because they reflect light.

"White, yellow, light blue, anything that the lights pick up will give the appearance of being bulbous, but they're all cut from the same dies and stuffed with the same padding as other stock gloves," said Ernie Gabion, a sports marketing representative for Everlast.

Rojas' gloves were black and the Cleto Reyes brand, which is known as the "puncher's glove" because they have a compact design that allows the user to make a tighter fist.

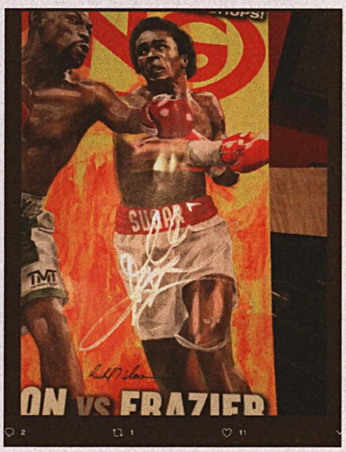
The Everlast gloves Diaz wore are also designed to be a "puncher's glove," but have added design features that could have made them appear bigger than Rojas' gloves.

"It's a looser glove," said Gabion. "It will never be as compact as our PowerLock. It's a softer leather, handmade in Mexico with a combination of high-density foam and traditional horsehair. Fighters prefer it because of its flexibility. They can open their hands easily, using them to parry (punches). But it's our purest puncher's glove."



Jesus Rojas (left) and Joseph Diaz Jr. disagree on which brand of glove works best.

TWEET OF THE MONTH



One of our subscribers, Olly (@scirasco1), got Sugar Ray Leonard to sign the Richard Slone-painted image of the Hall of Famer that graces the September mythical matchups issue.

WRITE TO THE RING!
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EXHIBITIONISTS

I never knew that Joe Louis' knockout of Johnny Davis in November 1944 was viewed as a defense of the world title by the New York State Athletic Commission ("Unbreakable," July 2018 issue). Please tell me where Davis was then rated by The Ring. Also, where was Elmer Ray rated in 1949? Louis had three forgotten "exhibitions" in 1949 against Ray, who is rated in the top 50 punchers of all time. These three bouts were real contests. Two were staged just before Louis retired, and the third came two weeks after his retirement. This was a KO win for Louis.

Barrie Reader
Carshalton, U.K.

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: The Johnny Davis fight never should have been sanctioned; Davis was a 3-3 novice who was lucky to live through the experience. Even though it was billed as a real fight in New York because NYSAC Chairman John J. Phelan opposed the notion of "exhibitions," it was scheduled for the exhibition distance of four rounds and is not counted by most as a legitimate title defense for Louis. Mr. Stradley cited it in his story to provide the highest possible count for Louis' consecutive defenses, but Louis would still hold the record even without it. Davis was unranked by The Ring.

As for Elmer Ray, he was ranked No. 2 by The Ring in the February 1948 issue and unranked by the February 1949 issue. In May 1948, he was knocked out by Ezzard Charles, so that probably explains the drop. His final "official" fight was in March 1949 against John Holman. It's true what you say about the first two of the Louis exhibitions being competitive, but the third unfortunately was not. It took place just eight days after Ray was knocked out by Holman, and Ray subsequently announced his retirement in order to save his health.

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RINGSIDE BY RICKY HATTON

A DREAM NIGHT: CONQUERING KOSTYA

Beating Kostya Tszyu on June 4, 2005, was everything to me.

Because of the success I had as an amateur, I had confidence in myself from a very young age. As a professional, I won national titles, international titles and the British title, but there was still a feeling that I was a little over-protected. There were those who believed I was too attack-minded, I cut too easy and that I was just an exciting fighter with a big following. But me and (trainer) Billy Graham had confidence that we could compete at the highest level.

Tszyu was a formidable world champion, one of the best junior welterweights of all time, and he was ranked No. 2 pound-for-pound. In Britain they were saying poor Ricky Hatton doesn't have much of a chance, and if he wins it would be one of the biggest wins in a British boxing ring. So when I won that fight, you can imagine how I felt the next morning. To be honest, it's a dream that I'll never wake up from.

It was a perfect ending. If I'd won the fight by knockout, then that would have been fantastic, obviously, but to have such a formidable champion stay on his stool and say, "No more," that was probably better than a one-punch knockout. The first thing I wanted to do afterward was grab the mic and tell the crowd to give Kostya Tszyu, a wonderful champion, his respect. And then he took the mic and did the same. The atmosphere during the fight was electric and the ending was fairytale stuff.

I'd won the Ring Magazine belt and the IBF title, and I'd done it against one of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world. I had to pinch myself, and it's something I'm very proud of to this day. I can go into Manchester and people will tell me they were there when I beat Kostya Tszyu and that it was one of the greatest nights of their lives. You never think that you're going to be involved in fights like that. It was mind-boggling – unbelievable.

That was probably the best night for my fans, too. The fans saw me as one of their own, and even all these years later, with everything I did in my career, you never see me on a celebrity TV show. You never see me going down a red carpet. People would see me fight, or they would see me supporting Manchester City, or they would see me at the local pub playing darts, and they could relate. I also had a sense of humor, and I liked a laugh and a joke. I think fans all over the U.K. felt like they weren't just cheering on a British boxer fighting for a world title – I think they felt like they were cheering on a mate.

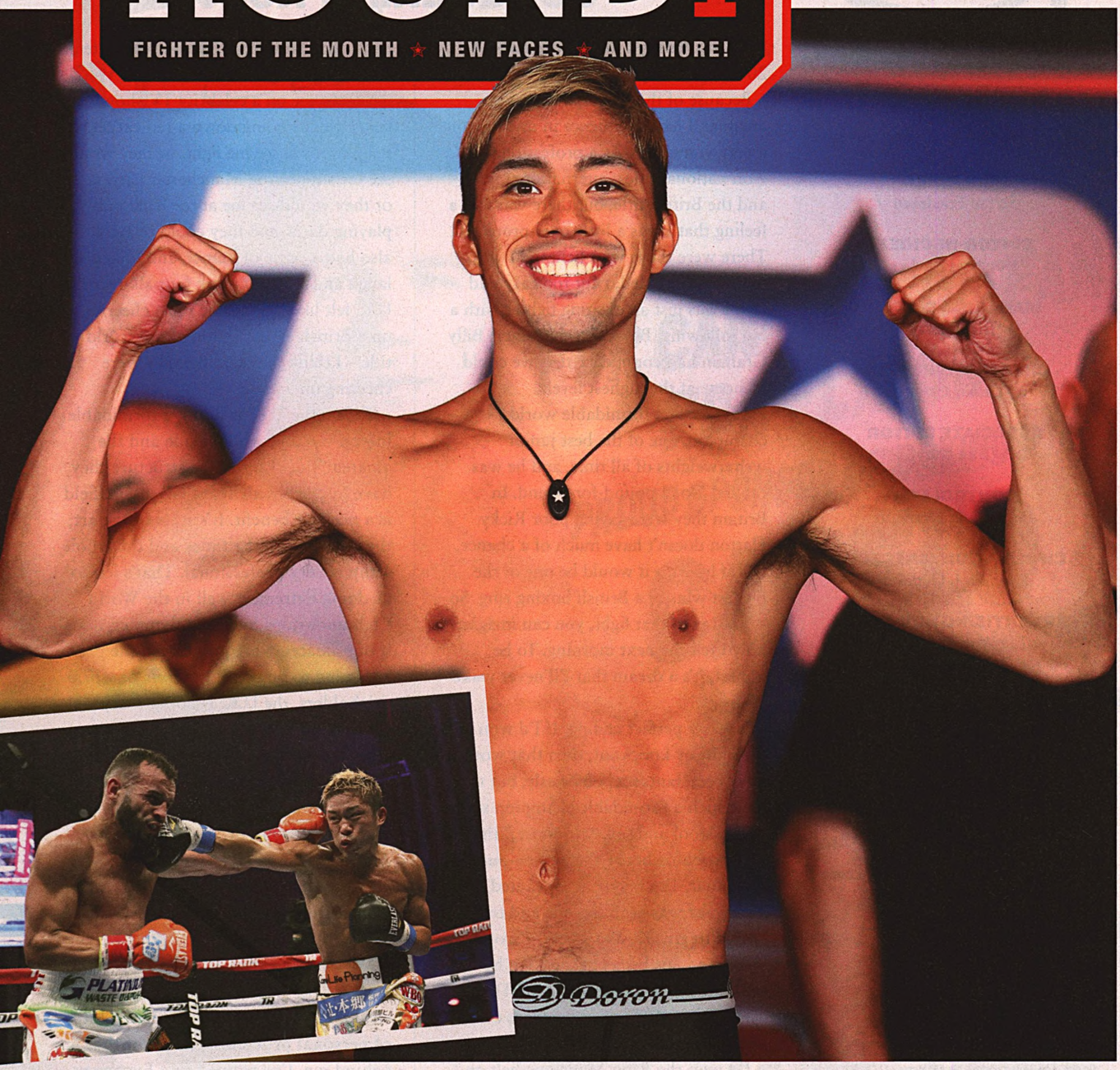
Today, the U.K. is doing a formidable job on the professional side and the amateur side. I think the structure they have in place with Team GB in Sheffield is a massive benefit. It's state of the art; they move with the times and the whole setup is very professional. That's led to us doing extremely well in the World Championships and the Olympics, and if our amateurs are good, then the pros are going to be good. In terms of world titleholders, the U.K. is doing every bit as good as the U.S., and when you consider the size of Great Britain as compared to America, I think that's a wonderful achievement that we should all be very proud of. We've also got Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury at the very top of the heavyweight scene, and Daniel Dubois and Nathan Gorman are part of a new generation at that weight.

My role as a trainer is brilliant right now. It was well documented that I struggled in retirement and had a lot of personal problems, but all of that is behind me. I've trained two European champions and a world champion (Zhanat Zhakiyanov). There aren't too many former world champions who have trained a world champion, especially in Britain. I'm very proud of what I've achieved as a trainer, and my next goal is to bring a British fighter through and make him a world champion. I'd like to stand in a Las Vegas ring with a new world champion who has made the British fans as proud as – hopefully – I did in my own career.

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES ★ AND MORE!

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH



MASAYUKI ITO

When The Ring examined the Japanese boxing scene in an article entitled RISING SONS in the May 2018 issue, no boxer over 115 pounds was profiled. Masayuki Ito, an unrated junior lightweight from Tokyo, wasn't just unknown in the U.S., he was under the radar in Japan. All that changed on July 28, when Ito soundly outworked game Puerto Rican standout Christopher Diaz over 12 spirited rounds in Kissimmee, Florida, to claim the vacant WBO title. Ito (24-1-1, 12 knockouts), who turned pro in 2009 without amateur experience, scored a knockdown in Round 4, turned the heads of U.S. fans that watched the bout on ESPN+ and now finds himself in the middle of a talented 130-pound mix that includes fellow beltholders Miguel Berchelt, Gervonta Davis and Tevin Farmer. Veteran trainer Rudy Hernandez, who has overseen Ito's California-based camps for the past four years and worked his corner for the Diaz fight, says the still-developing 27-year-old isn't in the class of the aforementioned fighters yet, but has promise. "I think he's a lower-top-10 junior lightweight right now," Hernandez said, "but his potential is to be the best 130 pounder in the game one day."

British heavyweight Joe Joyce has invested in his budding pro career by relocating to California to work with noted trainer Abel Sanchez.

NEW FACES

JOE JOYCE

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT

Joe Joyce is the quintessential modern heavyweight, standing 6-foot-6 and weighing a solid 250 pounds. The former amateur standout also appears to have the tools to one day challenge the very best.

As a youngster, Joyce tried various sports, but it wasn't until he was 22 – and attending Middlesex University in London, where he studied fine arts – that he first paid a visit to his local boxing club, Earlsfield ABC.

Head coach Sid Khan proved to be a tough taskmaster, keeping Joyce motivated and helping him to grow as a fighter.

"I really caught the bug," Joyce told The Ring. "I kept winning and I could see myself progressing."

After winning the first of two Amateur Boxing Association titles in 2012, Joyce was invited to train with Team GB in Sheffield alongside future heavyweight titleholder Anthony Joshua. There, Joyce enjoyed high-level sparring with the likes of Frazer Clarke, Daniel Dubois and Nathan Gorman in addition to "AJ." He gained further experience going to Tyson Fury's gym, where he worked out with the former heavyweight champion and cousin Hughie Fury, and has even been to the U.S. to train with former titleholder Bermane Stiverne and contender Dominic Breazeale.

Joyce traveled the world with Team GB, winning gold at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, silver at the 2016 Rio Olympics and bronze at both the European and World Amateur Championships. The big Londoner estimates he won around 80 out of 100 amateur bouts. He also fought in the World Series of Boxing, going 13-2.

Joyce turned down several offers to turn professional, but eventually signed with Hayemaker Ringstar in October 2017. Since making the jump to the pro ranks, he has lived up to the nickname "Juggernaut" by steamrolling all five of his opponents to date inside the distance.

"Ian Lewison was a big test for my first fight on paper, but I passed with flying colors," Joyce said. "I thought Donnie Palmer (his third pro opponent) would be a tricky fight. I was quite surprised I got him out so quickly (38 seconds).

"It's more rewarding beating better guys than blowing them out in the first round."

In just his fourth outing, Joyce impressively took out Lenroy Thomas to win the Commonwealth title in record time (KO 2).

Respected boxing guru Eric Armit, a prolific writer and a director for the Commonwealth Boxing Council, is acutely aware of Joyce's abilities.

"He is immensely strong with a big punch," said Armit. "He is no lumbering lump, but not particularly fast either. His defense is not too solid. None of his victims have been hard punchers, and unless he tightens up his defense, it could let him down against higher level opposition.

"Obviously, as he did not turn pro until he was 32, time is not on his side, but the level of his opposition has been inconsistent, ranging from good, mid-level opposition such as Ian Lewison and Lenroy Thomas down to hapless fighters such as Rudolf Jozic and Ivica Bacurin."

Joyce himself is perhaps feeling the pressure of time, and in late July started working with renowned trainer Abel Sanchez – who has had great success with a 30-something fighter named Gennady Golovkin – in Big Bear, California.

If all goes well, Joyce hopes to move quickly onto the world stage. He has one eye on beating Michael Bentt's British record for fewest fights to win a portion of the heavyweight title, which stands at 12 (Bentt knocked out Tommy Morrison in 1993 for the WBO belt).

He also has unfinished business. When Joyce was on the podium at the Olympics, he was flanked by the man who beat him in controversial fashion in the final, Tony Yoka, and bronze co-medalists Filip Hrgovic and Ivan Dychko. All three are now in the professional ranks.

"There's some really good fights out there for the future," Joyce said. "I fought Hrgovic once and that was a really close fight.

"Yoka started the trash talking – that's not what amateur boxing is about. He said some things in interviews. How dare he showboat in the Olympic final – the Ali shuffle – when he's clearly lost the fight?"

Hopefully that score can be settled along with other battles among the new generation of heavyweights being ushered in. The next couple of years look promising.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

TO STAND WHERE NO ONE STOOD BEFORE

I was thinking recently about a conversation I had with Joe Frazier years ago. Joe was reminiscing about his first fight against Muhammad Ali. "The Fight of the Century," it was called.

"That night at Madison Square Garden," Joe told me, "fifteenth round when I put Ali down. I stood where no one else ever stood."

Other sports stir passions. But no matter how much glory there is in winning the Super Bowl or World Cup, those are team sports. Is it nice to win an individual championship at Wimbledon or Augusta? Absolutely. But no sport has been invested with more social and political symbolism than boxing. And no sporting events have demanded more attention than the biggest fights of all time.

A significant portion of the population doesn't know who won the World Series the day after it's over. Sports fans do. Your 80-year-old grandmother might not.

But virtually everyone on the planet knew that Joe Frazier beat Muhammad Ali on March 8, 1971. Joe Louis' first-round knockout of Max Schmeling in 1938 sent similar shockwaves around the globe. And Ali experienced his ultimate moment of glory when he reclaimed the throne against George Foreman in Zaire.

Just winning a championship is enthralling. In his autobiography, Sugar Ray Robinson recalled his first world title, a 15-round decision at Madison Square Garden over Tommy Bell: "The ring announcer was holding a microphone and blaring 'The new world welterweight champion . . .' And even though he was only a few feet away, I could hardly hear him. My ears were almost bursting with the noise. The most noise seemed to come down out of the balcony; a steady roar, like a waterfall splashing all over me. Unless you've been in that ring when the noise is for you, there's no way you'll ever know what it's like."

Now magnify that feeling exponentially by adding the hopes and fears of millions of people around the globe to the drama. To be Joe Louis, knowing that this is the first time many people have heard a black man referred to simply as "the American." To be Jack Johnson or Joe Frazier or Muhammad Ali.

To be standing in the center of the ring – for one night, the center of the world – and know you've done it. Think about that feeling for a moment.

That's boxing at its greatest.

★★★★

MARK TWAIN MEETS JAMES CORBETT

Mark Twain was a fight fan. He attended several boxing matches and characterized them as "absorbingly interesting."

On January 25, 1894, heavyweight champion James J. Corbett knocked out Charlie Mitchell in three rounds at the Duval Athletic Club in Jacksonville. Corbett then took a train directly to New York and, two days later, boxed a three-round exhibition at Madison Square Garden against Dan Creedon (a sparring partner who had helped him prepare for the Mitchell fight).

Twain was at that exhibition accompanied by Henry H. Rogers (an industrialist and financier who was one of the richest men in America).

The following day, Twain wrote to his wife, Livy, telling her, "We bought a fifteen-dollar box in the Madison Square Garden. Rogers bought it, not I. There was a vast multitude of people in the brilliant place. (World-renowned architect) Stanford White came along presently and invited me to go to the World Champion's dressing room, which I was very glad to do. Corbett has a fine face and is modest and diffident besides being the most perfectly and beautifully constructed human animal in the world."

What did Twain and Corbett talk about?

According to Twain's letter to his wife, he told the champion, "You have whipped Mitchell, and maybe you will whip (Peter) Jackson. But you are not done then. You will have to tackle me."

And how did Corbett respond to his slightly-built challenger, a man with no apparent physical gifts?

"He answered so gravely," Twain recounted, "that one might easily have thought him in earnest. 'No! I am not going to meet you in the ring. It is not fair or right to require it. You might chance to knock me

out by no merit of your own but by a purely accidental blow; and then my reputation would be gone and you would have a double one. You have got fame enough and you ought not to want to take mine away from me.'"

As for the action that unfolded at Madison Square Garden that night, Twain wrote, "There were lots of little boxing matches to entertain the crowd. Then, at last, Corbett appeared in the ring and the 8,000 people present went mad with enthusiasm. My two artists (illustrators who had joined Twain, Rogers, and White in the box) went mad about his form. They said they had never seen anything that came reasonably near equaling its perfection except Greek statues, and they didn't surpass it.

"Corbett boxed three rounds," Twain concluded. "Oh, beautiful to see."

★★★★

ELVIS PRESLEY AND BOXING

Elvis Presley was intrigued by the sweet science. He tried out for the boxing team at Humes High School in Memphis but quit after one day when he suffered a bloody nose. Years later, he played the lead in a 1962 remake of the classic film *Kid Galahad*.

The original version of *Kid Galahad* was good for its time.

Ward Guisenberry (played by Wayne Morris) is a naive, gullible, handsome farmboy who's working as a bellhop at a Florida hotel so he can get enough money to buy a farm. Defending a woman's honor at a party thrown by fight manager Nick Donati (Edward G. Robinson), Ward punches out a big lug who, it turns out, is heavyweight champion Chuck McGraw. This piques Donati's interest. He gets Ward a trainer, puts him in the ring and watches as the newly-christened "Kid Galahad" moves quickly up the ladder to challenge for the heavyweight crown.

There's also a love triangle involving Wade, Louise "Fluff" Phillips (Nick's assistant, played by Bette Davis), and Jean Donati (Nick's sister, played by Jane Bryan).

Bette Davis has some of the better lines in the film. "They'll all be talking about you someday," she tells Wade. "And then they'll forget about you." Speaking with Wade about McGraw's manager, mobster Turkey Morgan (Humphrey Bogart), Fluff confides, "He'd just a soon kill me or you as take a drink." And in a moment of anger, she tells Nick, "I've never liked you, and I'm not going to start now."

That sentiment is understandable, since Nick has told Fluff, "There isn't any room for feelings in this game. A fighter is a machine, not a violin player." Or as Mama Donati (Soledad Jimenez) tells her daughter, "Nicky is a manager of fighters, not of people's hearts."

The original *Kid Galahad* plays nicely on the emotions. The black-and-white cinematography is wonderful. The heroes are heroes, and the villains are villains. There's the usual skullduggery of double-crosses and fixed fights (which are choreographed like cartoons). It's unrealistic, hokey, and lots of fun.

As for the remake … Elvis plays Walter Gulick, a young man recently discharged from the Army who's seeking employment as an automobile mechanic. He winds up in the Catskills, where he takes a job as a sparring partner for five dollars a round to make ends meet. Lo and behold, it turns out that Walter has one-punch knockout power. Things go from there.

Gig Young plays Willy Grogan, a small-time manager in trouble with the mob. The ever-forgiving Walter says of Grogan, "He's not a bad guy. Maybe he's got a reason for being a liar." Meanwhile, transfixed by Walter's power and ability to take a punch, Grogan declares, "He's got an ax in his right hand and a bowling ball for a head."

Lola Albright plays Dolly Fletcher, Grogan's love interest. Joan Blackman is cast as Rose (Grogan's sister and the object of Elvis' affections). Charles Bronson plays Lew Nyack, Walter's camp buddy and trainer, who at one point counsels his charge, "Hey Walter. In case you want to duck once in a while, it ain't against the rules."

The fight scenes with Elvis are as realistic as a theatrical production would be if Adrien Broner played Hamlet. It's a mediocre movie with Elvis singing some of his lesser songs.

Presley was a one-of-a-kind superstar, known and idolized the world over. There was, of course, another global superstar of equal if not greater magnitude who shared the spotlight with Elvis – Muhammad Ali.

The King of Rock and Roll and the King of Boxing met on two occasions. The first was in Las Vegas, when Ali saw Elvis perform. "All my life, I admired Elvis Presley," Muhammad said afterward. "It was a thrill to meet him."

The two men met again in a Las Vegas hotel suite just prior to Ali's February 14, 1973, fight against Joe Bugner. Elvis presented Muhammad with a faux-jewel-studded robe emblazoned with the words "The People's Choice." Ali wore it in his next fight, which was against Ken Norton. But as The Greatest later recalled, "I got my jaw broke and stopped wearing it."

"I felt sorry for Elvis," Ali said a decade after Presley's death. "He didn't enjoy life the way he should. He stayed indoors all the time. I told him he should go out and see people. He said he couldn't because, everywhere he went, they mobbed him. He didn't understand. No one wanted to hurt him. All they wanted was to be friendly and tell him how much they loved him."

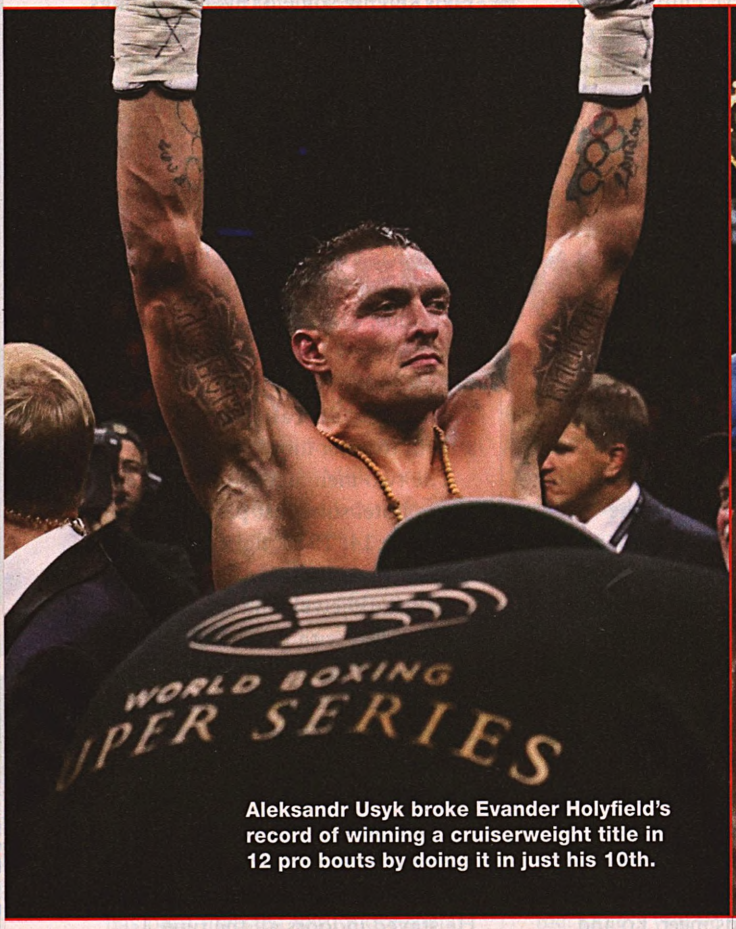
Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His next book – Protect Yourself at All Times – will be published this autumn by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism.

FIGHTS OF FANTASY

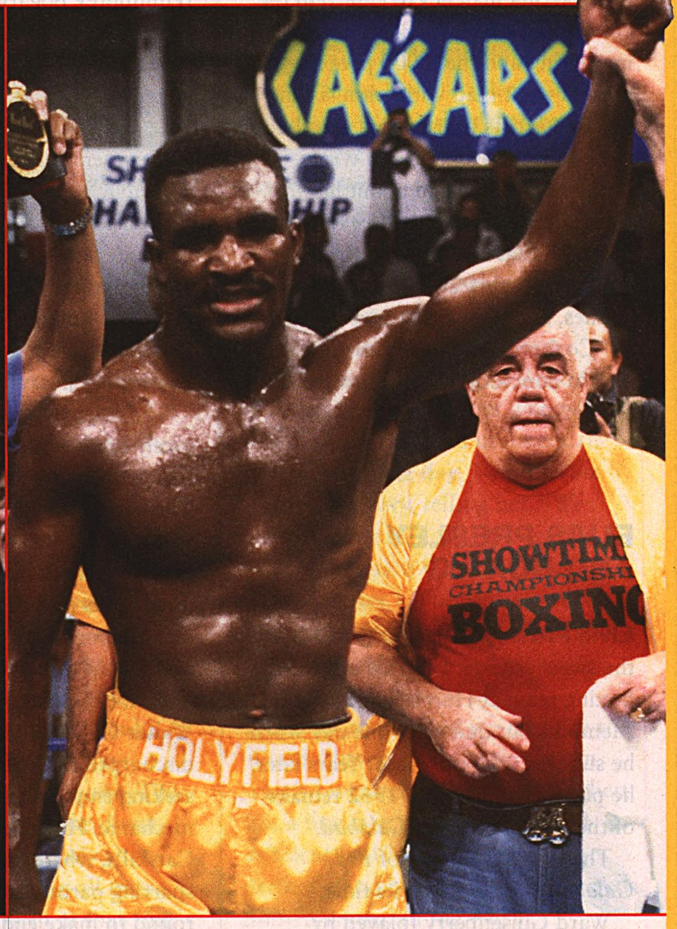
M GRAY

A clash between undisputed champions in the same division is obviously impossible – unless of course it's a fantasy fight.

Between July 1986 and December 1987, Evander Holyfield won every available title belt at the cruiserweight limit of 190 pounds. His victims were Dwight Muhammad Qawi (WBA), Ricky Parkey (IBF) and Carlos DeLeon (WBC). Shortly thereafter, Holyfield moved north to heavyweight, where he enjoyed even more success.



Aleksandr Usyk broke Evander Holyfield's record of winning a cruiserweight title in 12 pro bouts by doing it in just his 10th.



ALEKSANDR USYK VS. EVANDER HOLYFIELD

THREE EXPERTS – A FIGHTER, A TRAINER AND A MEDIA MEMBER – TELL YOU HOW A MYTHICAL MATCHUP WOULD PLAY OUT

Three decades later, Ukrainian star Aleksandr Usyk followed Holyfield's lead, claiming all cruiserweight belts at the new division limit of 200 pounds. Between September 2016 and July 2018, the former amateur standout defeated Krzysztof Glowacki (WBO), Mairis Briedis (WBC) and Murat Gassiev (IBF, WBA and Ring).

The cruiserweight version of Holyfield and Usyk share other similarities. Both are almost identical in terms of height and reach. Both were Olympic medalists. Both men achieved cruiserweight dominance with unbeaten records. However, the fighting styles are vastly different. Holyfield was a cerebral boxer-puncher who relished a tear-up, whereas Usyk is a mobile southpaw who exemplifies the "hit and don't be hit" philosophy.

The consensus among fans and experts is that Holyfield is the greatest cruiserweight of all time. Does Usyk challenge that supremacy, or would "The Real Deal" have had too much for today's undisputed king?

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for The Ring. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing

HOLYFIELD ★ TALE OF THE TAPE ★ USYK

CRUISERWEIGHT

HOLYFIELD		USYK
25	AGE	31
17-0 (13 KOS)*	RECORD	15-0 (11 KOS)
81 PERCENT	KO PERCENTAGE	73 PERCENT
ORTHODOX	STANCE	SOUTHPAW
6 FEET 2½ INCHES	HEIGHT	6 FEET 3 INCHES
78 INCHES	REACH	78 INCHES

FIGHTER

Johnny Nelson

FORMER WBO CRUISERWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER

Usyk's confidence is not 100 percent at this point, but even at the 80 percent he's at, he's good enough to beat everybody around. He's tall, he's southpaw, he's rangy, he's mobile. I once saw him spar with Wladimir Klitschko and they kicked him out of the gym after one round because he was making Wladimir look bad. I remember saying to myself, 'Shit! Who the hell is that?' I knew then that he was going to be world champion. I also picked him to win the World Boxing Super Series when it was announced, because nobody in the division has that talent. It was the same with Holyfield; he obliterated the entire cruiserweight division and had to move up to heavyweight. His style was totally different to Usyk's; it was offense and defense, but he had it down to a T. His basics were exceptional and he put everything together at cruiserweight. From what we've seen of Usyk and what we know of Holyfield at cruiserweight, I would have to pick Holyfield to win that fight. It's not just about ability, it's about character. Holyfield is one of these fighters who could be getting beat for 11-and-a-half rounds and he still thinks he's gonna beat you. When you hit him, he'd come right back at you with everything he had. He was the whole package: dangerous, compact and just an all-around fighter.

Prediction: HOLYFIELD

TRAINER

Dave Coldwell

TRAINER OF TONY BELLEW, JAMIE MCDONNELL AND GAVIN MCDONNELL

Just before Usyk turned pro, Tony (Bellew) told me it was nailed-on for this guy to become a fantastic fighter. Now, he looked unbelievable against Gassiev, but that style was made to order. Usyk was getting hit in previous fights, but Gassiev, as good a puncher as he is, was too slow, too predictable and too limited in terms of punch selection. One of Usyk's best assets is his lead hand – he uses it in defense, he uses it in offense, he uses it set up attacks, he uses it to measure. He also has an incredible engine for a man of his size. His speed and punch output is incredible. Holyfield had great shot selection, his combination punching was fantastic and his intelligence was underrated. He had the same kind of heart which he showed at heavyweight in later years, but Holyfield also had quickness, athleticism and good feet as a cruiserweight. He could definitely match Usyk in terms of his engine, because it's one thing to have that engine when everything is going your way, but Holyfield proved that he had the engine in a competitive 15-round fight (against Qawi). That is remarkable. It's a very hard fight to pick, because Holyfield struggled against southpaws. In the first (Michael) Moorer fight, he encountered a lot of problems. At cruiserweight, I just think he would find a way to win.

Prediction: HOLYFIELD

MEDIA

Cliff Rold

COLUMNIST AT BOXINGSCENE

Usyk-Holyfield would match two complete talents with deep amateur experience and a similar early depth of professional experience. Usyk impressed in the WBSS, displaying poise in three straight road wins. Along with that poise, the southpaw exhibited intelligent volume, an expert jab, agility, and physical strength. The last of those would be important against Holyfield, who was naturally a hair smaller than Usyk. Holyfield at cruiserweight remains the gold standard – the first man to make the class relevant. Holyfield was also a volume puncher but with advantages in finishing ability, speed and fluidity. Only Qawi lasted the distance with Holyfield in a cruiserweight title fight. When he finished his unification of the division with a knockout of DeLeon, it was the sixth of 13 straight stoppages that ultimately carried Holyfield to the heavyweight title. This version of Holyfield was a dangerous man. A fight with Usyk would likely play out with Usyk boxing more at range and Holyfield pressing smartly, on his toes and behind the jab. Holyfield would have issues early with the southpaw length of Usyk and could always be troubled by a good jab. Usyk's uppercut would also be a problem. They just wouldn't be as big a problem as Holyfield's inside game, left hook, counter right and harder combinations. Holyfield might not stop Usyk, but he'd outwork him – and with meaner effect on his shots. The pick is Holyfield by decision.

Prediction: HOLYFIELD

*Tale of the tape for Holyfield is up to April 1988.

RATINGS

POUND FOR POUND ★ RATINGS ANALYSIS ★ THE RING RATINGS

Mikey Garcia had no trouble landing punches on fellow unbeaten lightweight beltholder Robert Easter Jr. despite giving up five inches in height and eight inches in wingspan.

POUND FOR POUND

1 **GENNADY GOLOVKIN**
Kazakhstan • 38-0-1 (34 KOs)

2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)

3 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 33-0-0 (24 KOs)

4 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
Ukraine • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)

5 **MIKEY GARCIA**
U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)

6 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 16-0-0 (14 KOs)

7 **SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 46-4-1 (41 KOs)

8 **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)

9 **DONNIE NIETES**
Philippines • 41-1-4 (23 KOs)

10 **LEO SANTA CRUZ**
U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)

POUND FOR POUND: Sergey Kovalev (No. 9 last month) flirted with occupying the top P4P spot before meeting Andre Ward in 2016 – and then again in 2017 – but has been slipping down the ladder ever since. He finally fell off the list after getting knocked out in seven rounds by undefeated Colombian light heavyweight Eleider Alvarez on August 4 in Atlantic City. With "Krusher" gone, three-division titleholder Leo Santa Cruz stepped in at No. 10.

HEAVYWEIGHTS: Dillian Whyte (No. 6 last month) looked like a legitimate top 5 heavyweight in defeating former titleholder Joseph Parker (No. 4 at the time) by a narrow unanimous decision, so it seemed only right that he be raised to No. 5. Parker fell to No. 6 while Luis Ortiz went from No. 5 to No. 4 after reminding us all of his punching power with a second-round knockout of Razvan Cojanu (unrated).

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Alvarez (No. 5 last month) threw down the gauntlet for any would-be Upset of the Year challengers with his knockout of the No. 1-rated Kovalev. The pair switched places in the ratings and Alvarez walked away with the Russian's WBO title.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No change.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No change.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: After a pair of wins at 140, Mikey Garcia dropped back down to 135 to unify two titles with an impressive UD over the hitherto-undefeated Robert Easter. With the victory, Garcia rose from No. 2 to displace Jorge Linares as the No. 1 contender below champion Vasiliy Lomachenko. The talented Easter didn't suffer too much, falling from No. 3 to No. 4.

Christopher Diaz (left) and Masayuki Ito traded leather for 12 intense rounds, with the unheralded Japanese fighter earning a unanimous decision to claim the vacant WBO 130-pound title.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: After a terrific back-and-forth scrap, previously unranked Masayuki Ito came in at No. 7 by winning the vacant WBO belt with a unanimous decision over Christopher Diaz, who dropped off the list from the No. 9 spot.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Joseph Diaz Jr. (No. 8 last month) vs. Jesus Rojas (No. 9) proved to be an excellent bit of matchmaking marred only by Diaz missing weight, and they took a step in opposite directions – Diaz to No. 7, Rojas to No. 10 – after "JoJo" won a narrow (forget about that 117-111 card) unanimous decision.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Apparently now rehabbed by a series of eight-rounders after his failed title shot against Jonathan Guzman in 2016, Shingo Wake returned to the ratings at No. 10 after snagging the Japanese title with a 10th-round stoppage of Yusaku Kuga (unranked). The following week, Tevin Farmer buried his overturned loss to Kenichi Ogawa from eight months earlier with a legitimate domination of Billy Dib in Australia to win the vacant IBF belt. Farmer's rise from No. 5 to No. 4 was modest, but the achievement was massive for a man who'd overcome some hefty setbacks, including a bullet through his hand.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No change.

FLYWEIGHTS: Sho Kimura gained a rank (from No. 5 to No. 4) after defending his WBO title for the second time with a sixth-round knockout of Froilan Saludar (unrated), who was hoping to join his brother, strawweight Vic Saludar, as a belt-wearer.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No change.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No change.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ANTHONY JOSHUA** U.K. • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
- **2 DEONTAY WILDER** U.S. • 40-0-0 (39 KOs)
- **3 ALEXANDER POVETKIN** Russia • 34-1-0 (24 KOs)
- **4 LUIS ORTIZ** Cuba • 29-1-0 (25 KOs)
- **5 DILLIAN WHYTE** U.K. • 24-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **6 JOSEPH PARKER** New Zealand • 24-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **7 DOMINIC BREAZEALE** U.S. • 19-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **8 JARRELL MILLER** U.S. • 21-0-1 (18 KOs)
- **9 ADAM KOWNACKI** U.S. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **10 TYSON FURY** U.K. • 26-0-0 (19 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 LBS

- **C ALEKSANDR USYK** Ukraine • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **1 MAIRIS BRIEDIS** Latvia • 24-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **2 MURAT GASSIEV** Russia • 26-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **3 DENIS LEBEDEV** Russia • 30-2-0 (22 KOs)
- **4 YUNIER DORTICOS** Cuba • 22-1-0 (21 KOs)
- **5 KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** Poland • 30-1-0 (19 KOs)
- **6 MAKSIM VLASOV** Russia • 42-2-0 (25 KOs)
- **7 KEVIN LERENA** S. Africa • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **8 ANDREW TABITI** U.S. • 16-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **9 ILUNGA MAKABU** Congo • 21-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **10 CONSTANTIN BEJENARU** Moldova • 13-0-0 (3 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 ELEIDER ALVAREZ** Colombia • 24-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **2 DMITRY BIVOL** Russia • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **3 ADONIS STEVENSON** Canada • 29-1-1 (24 KOs)
- **4 BADOU JACK** Sweden • 22-1-3 (13 KOs)
- **5 SERGEY KOVALEV** Russia • 32-3-1 (28 KOs)
- **6 OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK** Ukraine • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **7 ARTUR BETERBIEV** Russia • 12-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **8 SULLIVAN BARRERA** Cuba • 21-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **9 MARCUS BROWNE** U.S. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **10 JOE SMITH JR.** U.S. • 24-2-0 (20 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 LBS

- **C (VACANT)**
- **1 GEORGE GROVES** U.K. • 28-3-0 (20 KOs)
- **2 GILBERTO RAMIREZ** Mexico • 38-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **3 CALLUM SMITH** U.K. • 24-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **5 DAVID BENAVIDEZ** U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **6 JOSE UZCATEGUI** Venezuela • 27-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **7 JAMES DEGALE** U.K. • 24-2-1 (14 KOs)
- **8 ANTHONY DIRRELL** U.S. • 32-1-1 (24 KOs)
- **4 CALEB TRUAX** U.S. • 29-4-2 (18 KOs)
- **9 CHRIS EUBANK JR.** U.K. • 26-2-0 (20 KOs)
- **10 ROCKY FIELDING** U.K. • 27-1-0 (15 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of August 12, 2018

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 GENNADY GOLOVKIN
Kaz. • 38-0-1 (34 KOs)
2 DANIEL JACOBS
U.S. • 34-2-0 (29 KOs)
3 BILLY JOE SAUNDERS
U.K. • 26-0-0 (12 KOs)
4 SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO
Ukraine • 12-0-0 (10 KOs)
5 JERMALL CHARLO
U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
6 RYOTA MURATA
Japan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
7 DEMETRIUS ANDRADE
U.S. • 25-0-0 (16 KOs)
8 DAVID LEMIEUX
Canada • 39-4-0 (33 KOs)
9 HASSAN N'DAM
Cameroon • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
10 GARY O'SULLIVAN
Ireland • 28-2-0 (20 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 JARRETT HURD
U.S. • 22-0-0 (15 KOs)
2 JERMELL CHARLO
U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)
3 ERISLANDY LARA
Cuba • 25-3-2 (14 KOs)
4 JAIME MUNGUIA
Mexico • 30-0-0 (25 KOs)
5 BRIAN CASTANO
Argentina • 15-0-0 (11 KOs)
6 MICHEL SORO
France • 32-2-1 (21 KOs)
7 JULIAN WILLIAMS
U.S. • 25-1-1 (15 KOs)
8 KELL BROOK
U.K. • 37-2-0 (26 KOs)
9 AUSTIN TROUT
U.S. • 31-5-0 (17 KOs)
10 LIAM SMITH
U.K. • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 KEITH THURMAN
U.S. • 28-0-0 (22 KOs)
2 ERROL SPENCE
U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)
3 TERENCE CRAWFORD
U.S. • 33-0-0 (24 KOs)
4 SHAWN PORTER
U.S. • 28-2-1 (17 KOs)
5 MANNY PACQUIAO
Phil. • 60-7-2 (39 KOs)
6 DANNY GARCIA
U.S. • 34-1-0 (20 KOs)
7 JESSIE VARGAS
U.S. • 28-2-1 (10 KOs)
8 EGIDIJUS KAVALIAUSKAS
Lithuania • 20-0-0 (16 KOs)
9 JEFF HORN
Australia • 18-1-1 (12 KOs)
10 YORDENIS UGAS
Cuba • 22-3-0 (11 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 REGIS PROGRAIS
U.S. • 22-0-0 (19 KOs)
2 JOSH TAYLOR
U.K. • 13-0-0 (11 KOs)
3 KIRYL RELIKH
Belarus • 22-2-0 (19 KOs)
4 JOSE RAMIREZ
U.S. • 22-0-0 (16 KOs)
5 ANTONIO OROZCO
U.S. • 27-0-0 (17 KOs)
6 VIKTOR POSTOL
Ukraine • 29-2-0 (12 KOs)
7 EDUARD TROYANOVSKY
Russia • 27-1-0 (24 KOs)
8 MAURICE HOOKER
U.S. • 24-0-3 (16 KOs)
9 SERGEY LIPINETS
Russia • 14-1-0 (10 KOs)
10 IVAN BARANCHYK
Russia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)

Hard-luck perennial contender Tevin Farmer (right) finally got his hands on a major junior lightweight belt with a lopsided decision over Billy Dib.

Joseph Diaz Jr. (right) won a hard-fought unanimous decision over fellow featherweight contender Jesus Rojas but he failed to make the 126-pound division limit for their showdown.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 LBS

C VASYL LOMACHENKO
Ukraine • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
1 MIKEY GARCIA
U.S. • 39-0-0 (30 KOs)
2 JORGE LINARES
Venezuela • 44-4-0 (27 KOs)
3 RAYMUNDO BELTRAN
Mexico • 35-7-1 (21 KOs)
4 ROBERT EASTER
U.S. • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)
5 RICHARD COMMEY
Ghana • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
6 ANTHONY CROLLA
U.K. • 33-6-3 (13 KOs)
7 LUKE CAMPBELL
U.K. • 18-2-0 (15 KOs)
8 YVAN MENDY
France • 40-4-1 (19 KOs)
9 LEWIS RITSON
U.K. • 16-0-0 (10 KOs)
10 JOSE PEDRAZA
Puerto Rico • 24-1-0 (12 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 MIGUEL BERCHELT
Mexico • 34-1-0 (30 KOs)
2 GERVONTA DAVIS
U.S. • 20-0-0 (19 KOs)
3 ALBERTO MACHADO
P.R. • 20-0-0 (16 KOs)
4 TEVIN FARMER
U.S. • 26-4-1 (5 KOs)
5 FRANCISCO VARGAS
Mexico • 25-1-2 (18 KOs)
6 MIGUEL ROMAN
Mexico • 60-12-0 (47 KOs)
7 MASAYUKI ITO
Japan • 24-1-1 (12 KOs)
7 JEZREEL CORRALES
Panama • 22-2-0 (8 KOs)
8 JHONNY GONZALEZ
Mexico • 66-10-0 (54 KOs)
10 EDUARDO HERNANDEZ
Mexico • 26-0-0 (23 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 LEO SANTA CRUZ
U.S. • 35-1-1 (19 KOs)
2 GARY RUSSELL JR.
U.S. • 29-1-0 (17 KOs)
3 CARL FRAMPTON
U.K. • 25-1-0 (14 KOs)
4 OSCAR VALDEZ
Mexico • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)
5 ABNER MARES
Mexico • 31-3-1 (15 KOs)
6 JOSH WARRINGTON
U.K. • 27-0-0 (6 KOs)
7 JOSEPH DIAZ JR.
U.S. • 27-1-0 (14 KOs)
8 LEE SELBY
U.K. • 26-2-0 (9 KOs)
9 SCOTT QUIGG
U.K. • 34-2-2 (25 KOs)
10 JESUS ROJAS
P.R. • 26-2-2 (19 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 LBS

C (VACANT)
1 GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX
Cuba • 17-1-0 (11 KOs)
2 ISAAC DOGBOE
Ghana • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
3 REY VARGAS
Mexico • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
4 DANIEL ROMAN
U.S. • 25-2-1 (9 KOs)
5 JESSIE MAGDALENO
U.S. • 25-1-0 (18 KOs)
6 DIEGO DE LA HOYA
Mexico • 21-0-0 (10 KOs)
7 RYOSUKE IWASA
Japan • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)
8 TOMOKI KAMEDA
Japan • 35-2-0 (20 KOs)
9 EMANUEL NAVARRETE
Mexico • 25-1-0 (22 KOs)
10 SHINGO WAKE
Japan • 25-5-2 (17 KOs)

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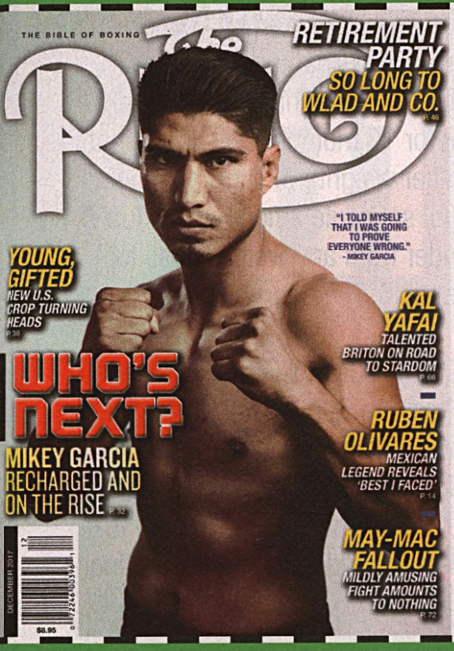

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RATINGS

Through fights of August 12, 2018

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 LBS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZOLANI TETE**
S. Africa • 27-3-0 (21 KOs)
2 **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 16-0-0 (14 KOs)
3 **RYAN BURNETT**
U.K. • 19-0-0 (9 KOs)
4 **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
P.R. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
5 **JUAN CARLOS PAYANO**
Dom. Rep. • 20-1-0 (9 KOs)
6 **ZHANAT ZHAKIYANOV**
Kaz. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
7 **LIBORIO SOLIS**
Venezuela • 26-5-1 (12 KOs)
8 **LEE HASKINS**
U.K. • 35-4-0 (14 KOs)
9 **JASON MOLONEY**
Australia • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
10 **NORDINE OUBAALI**
France • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 LBS

C **SRISASKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 46-4-1 (41 KOs)
1 **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
Mexico • 36-3-0 (25 KOs)
2 **KHALID YAFAI**
U.K. • 24-0-0 (15 KOs)
3 **JERWIN ANCAJAS**
Phil. • 30-1-1 (20 KOs)
4 **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
U.S. • 16-2-0 (4 KOs)
5 **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
Nicaragua • 46-2-0 (38 KOs)
6 **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
Puerto Rico • 17-3-0 (14 KOs)
7 **CARLOS CUADRAS**
Mexico • 36-3-1 (27 KOs)
8 **REX TSO**
China • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
9 **ANDREW MOLONEY**
Australia • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)
10 **WENFENG GE**
China • 10-0-0 (6 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 LBS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MORUTI MTHALANE**
S. Africa • 36-2-0 (24 KOs)
2 **ARTEM DALAKIAN**
Ukraine • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)
3 **ANDREW SELBY**
U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)
4 **SHO KIMURA**
Japan • 17-1-2 (10 KOs)
5 **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
Nicaragua • 27-3-0 (18 KOs)
6 **KOSEI TANAKA**
Japan • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)
7 **MASAYUKI KURODA**
Japan • 30-7-3 (16 KOs)
8 **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
Mexico • 28-4-1 (20 KOs)
9 **VINCENT LEGRAND**
France • 27-0-0 (16 KOs)
10 **MUHAMMAD WASEEM**
Pakistan • 8-1-0 (6 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 LBS

C **HEKKIE BUDLER**
S. Africa • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
1 **RYOICHI TAGUCHI**
Japan • 27-3-2 (12 KOs)
2 **KEN SHIRO**
Japan • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **CARLOS CANIZALES**
Venezuela • 21-0-1 (17 KOs)
4 **MILAN MELINDO**
Phil. • 37-3-0 (13 KOs)
5 **PEDRO GUEVARA**
Mexico • 31-3-1 (18 KOs)
6 **FELIX ALVARADO**
Nicaragua • 33-2-0 (29 KOs)
7 **ANGEL ACOSTA**
P.R. • 18-1-0 (18 KOs)
8 **AKIRA YAEGASHI**
Japan • 26-6-0 (14 KOs)
9 **GANIGAN LOPEZ**
Mexico • 34-8-0 (19 KOs)
10 **REY LORETO**
Phil. • 24-14-0 (16 KOs)

Sho Kimura retained his WBO flyweight belt for a second time by spoiling the title aspirations of Froilan Saludar in Nagoya, Japan.

South African correspondent Droeks Malan (center) presents the Ring junior flyweight title to Hekkie Budler, who earned it by upsetting Ryoichi Taguchi in May.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 LBS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
Thailand • 50-0-0 (18 KOs)
2 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART**
Thailand • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **HIROTO KYOGUCHI**
Japan • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **BYRON ROJAS**
Nicaragua • 24-3-3 (10 KOs)
5 **VIC SALUDAR**
Philippines • 18-3-0 (10 KOs)
6 **SIMPHIWE KHONCO**
S. Africa • 19-5-0 (7 KOs)
7 **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
Mexico • 22-4-1 (13 KOs)
8 **RYUYA YAMANAKA**
Japan • 16-3-0 (5 KOs)
9 **TATSUYA FUKUHARA**
Japan • 21-6-6 (7 KOs)
10 **TSUBASA KOURA**
Japan • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. THE RING's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the RING title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

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Pictured left to right: Damon Allen Jr., Jessie Vargas, Fernando Vargas

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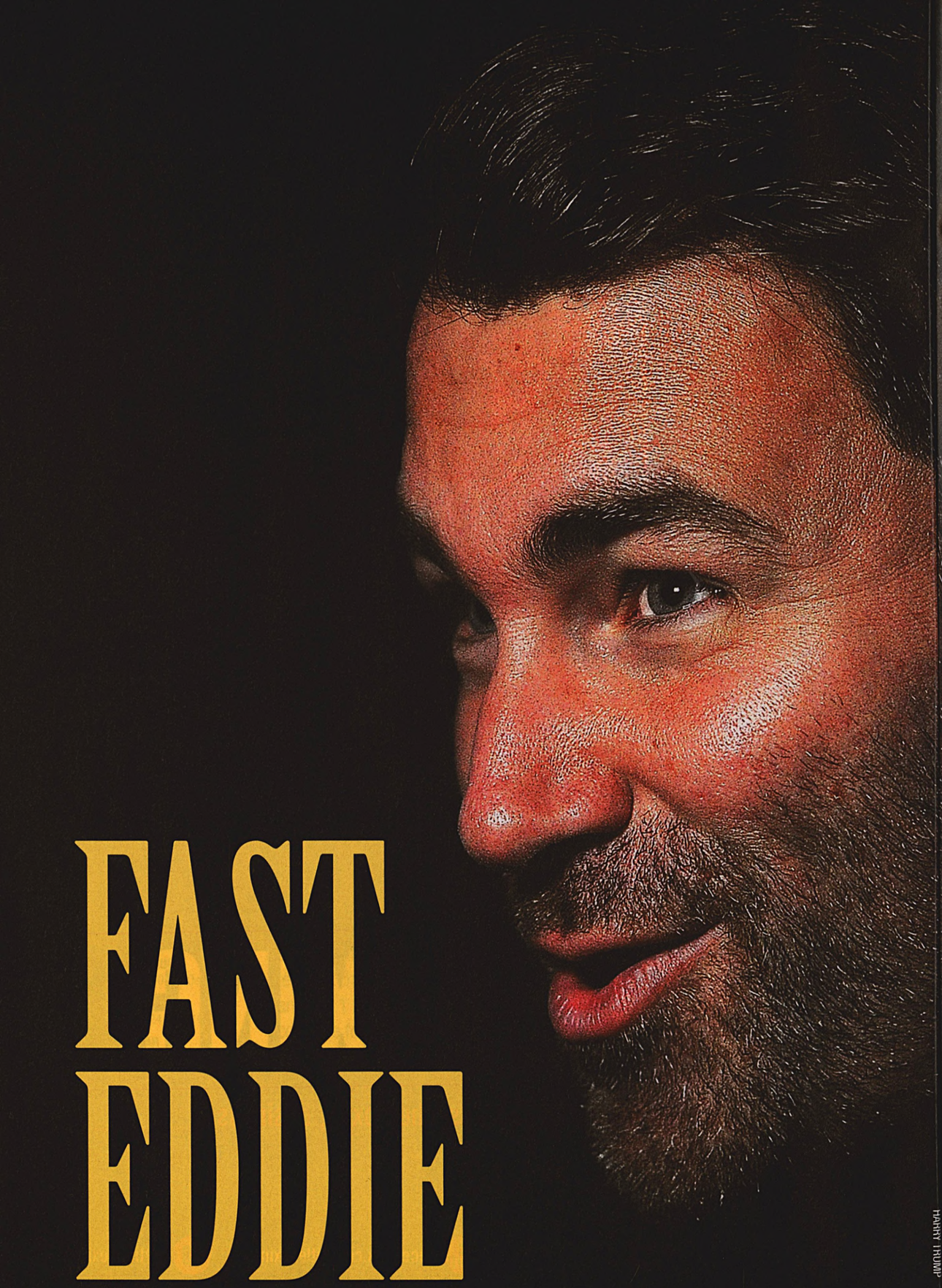


HARRY THUMP

BRITAIN'S PREMIER PROMOTER, **EDDIE HEARN**, AIMS TO BOLDLY EXPAND HIS BOXING EMPIRE TO TWO NEW FRONTIERS: THE U.S. AND DAZN STREAMING SERVICE

By **Gareth A Davies**

For Eddie Hearn to promise that he will be "five times more eccentric and arrogant" in the United States than in the United Kingdom is saying something. The 39-year-old promoter already has the gift of the gab, brilliant sales skills and the biggest commodity in boxing in heavyweight Anthony Joshua. He rarely rests, constantly updating his one million social media followers on the latest signing, event and matchup. But this fall he drives headlong into a new territory and new challenges – both personal and professional – with the launch of Matchroom in the USA, backed by sports media conglomerate Perform Group and its streaming service, DAZN.

September and October will bring major moments in the Essex promoter's life, first as The Joshua Show (vs. Alexander Povetkin), beamed from Wembley Stadium on September 22, and then his first U.S. card to be streamed on DAZN, in Chicago on October 6, heralding a new era.

Hearn told The Ring that he will be upping the ante at press conferences and fight events. Remarkable, really. But most likely the right move. And perhaps even more importantly, behind all this, he has secured the backing of Sir Len Blavatnik, owner of Perform Group and the richest man in Britain with a growing fortune of more than $21 billion.

The whispers in the U.S. are that the

Hearn has a brash, take-on-the-world attitude that is not unlike the fighting spirit of one of his standout boxers, Tony Bellew, seen here after upsetting David Haye in March 2017.

other promoters and managers – Oscar De La Hoya, Bob Arum, Al Haymon et al. – will conspire against him. But Hearn is the kind of operator who relishes that kind of collusion. After all, four stadium fights in the last four years in the United Kingdom have yielded crowds of 80,000 three times and 90,000 when Joshua captured the attention of the boxing world in a thriller against the aging Wladimir Klitschko.

Inarguably, Hearn is well-armed with top British boxers, and he has the financial clout to add significant U.S. fighters to his stable. At present, he guides four heavyweight standouts in Joshua, Dillian Whyte, Dereck Chisora and Tony Bellew. And while not a member of Hearn's roster, undisputed cruiserweight champion Aleksandr Usyk is screaming to come and fight in the U.K., seeking Bellew and even Joshua.

"I've lost count of the amount of people who have said, 'Everyone is working against you, except me.' If that's the game, then everyone is lying, because everyone is supposed to be working against me," said Hearn. "There are definitely people who are praying for my failure, but they were in the U.K. as well. We know how to deal with that. We've just got to work harder than everyone else. We've got the money and the broadcaster. We are the underdogs in the fact we're a new platform. But we are part of a new science, the new technology and a new era of broadcasting. Statistically, we're a proven winner. We're not just some streaming site. This is huge amounts of investments behind a model that has already broken the market and is working. There's huge numbers in Japan, Germany and Australia. We're very confident. It's flattering now people are saying there's four players in American boxing: Showtime, Bob Arum, Golden Boy and Matchroom. Already I feel quite proud we're in that group, because we've just entered the market. (Fight fans) are behind (DAZN); they want to see a change. When you're talking $9.99 a month for 16 U.S. shows and 16 U.K. shows, the World Boxing Super Series, Bellator – that's unbelievable value. ... And that's just the start. DAZN haven't even got out of first gear."

There it is, just a glimpse of Hearn the salesman, the innovator, the man charged with shaking up and creating his own American dream. Driven, insistent on success. By hook or by crook. "Look, America is the home of showbiz. Where are the promoters like Don King? Ethically, not everyone's cup of tea, but in terms of a promoter, he's probably the best there's ever been," reckoned Hearn. "When Don King had a fight in town, you knew it was happening. You've got to be fresh, to be loud, to be annoying. That's what promoters do. They're not there to be liked; they're there to be the mouthpiece.

"That's what's missing in America. There's no mouthpiece that people can be lured in by," he added. "I can lure the British public into a fight night. I need to be able to do that with the U.S. public. I'll be four or five times more eccentric and arrogant. I'll be a bit more controversial as we launch."

The linchpin to Matchroom Boxing's success, as well as DAZN's foray into boxing, is heavyweight star Anthony Joshua.

Hearn outlined with the hunger of a starving man how he intends to set about his work: "We're in Chicago; everything is geared towards that demographic. It's very heavily Spanish, Puerto Rican, Polish – so we have Jessie Vargas on the card. There's Artur Beterbiev against Callum Johnson for the IBF title. We have Jarrell Miller against Tomasz Adamek in the heavyweight division. And we have (Daniel) Roman against Gavin McDonnell. It's a very, very strong card. It's a sign of how we intend to go. Katie Taylor will go to Boston on October 20, as will Billy Joe Saunders against Demetrius Andrade for the WBO middleweight title. You look at the model we're using – it's Chicago for the first one and Boston for the second one – we're doing it differently. We're not just looking at L.A., the same old, same old. The cards are stacked from 7 p.m. with championship boxing. It's about a complete night of boxing."

Hearn is happy, moreover, that the launch event on DAZN will be a Joshua night, a powerful showcase from Wembley Stadium, where all the razzmatazz of the Matchroom shows in the U.K. will be on display. A pretty decent shop window. "That happened for a number of reasons. One, the money was fantastic. Two, Joshua liked the vision. It's something very different, a new model in a new era and Joshua believes in it. To launch the platform with the biggest star in world boxing is an incredibly powerful statement."

He's even toying with the idea of bringing Neil Diamond's 1969 hit "Sweet Caroline" to the show, as he has in the U.K. – a theme song that now gets the fans out of their seats, lights on their phones, swinging along, before Michael Buffer sets to the "rumble" moment. Buffer, of course, has been signed as part of the show.

"I think we should play it. It's not

rocket science. People ask how are we going to translate our product in America. Richard Schaefer was very critical, but Americans like the same things we like. We like a great night out. That's the target market. It's not difficult to give that – the fights have got to work and we work hard on doing that. The drinks have got to be flowing, fights have got to be great, people have got to be dressed up – we want to bring more women to the shows as well. We want to keep it fresh. I don't feel U.S. boxing has that. It's not a fashionable night out. A fashionable night out in the U.S. is at the UFC or Bellator."

In other words, Hearn aims to rubber stamp Matchroom's unique style in the USA. "It's about the build. The build begins from the initial press conference to Michael Buffer saying 'Let's get ready to rumble.' You have to build the narrative of each fight, the profile of each fighter. You need to get the fans excited about each individual. Look at what we do with our prospects in the U.K. Those guys who were at the Rio Olympics, four of them have won Commonwealth titles. Lawrence Okolie, Josh Kelly, Anthony Fowler, Joe Cordina are almost household names now already. By the time they get to fight for a world title, if they're good enough, they'll be superstars. I put Danny Jacobs in this class as well. He's a guy who should be one of the biggest sports stars in America. But he's had such a poor marketing job done for him over the years, we're now playing catch-up at a level when he's in his prime. You can't build him when he's in his prime. You've got to build from the debut."

They will head to established boxing hotbeds, such as California, New York City and Las Vegas, but Hearn will also follow a tried-and-trusted method that has served the promotional company in its European ventures, which is to build promising fighters in their hometowns.

"We want to bring boxing to cities that are pleased to see us. We did the same thing here, with Carl Frampton in Belfast, Josh Warrington in Leeds, Luke Campbell in Hull. You go to those places and people will thank you. You go to London and there's Beyonce on the same weekend. When we go to Chicago, to Boston, we want people to thank us, and then ask us when we are coming back ..."

As for Hearn himself, it is going to be a challenging transatlantic time in his life. The impact, he admits is going to be "a nightmare." Hearn's father, Barry, a legendary British sports promoter/agent and founder of Matchroom Sport, has warned his son of burnout.

"My dad's not someone that's going to come to you and tell you to take it easy. My dad will tell me I've got five years to crack this, give it every piece of your soul. If it doesn't work, don't worry. He's instilled that in me over the years, that mentality.

"I'm a total workaholic. To be a success in anything, you have to be a workaholic. There's being a workaholic and there's being passionate about what you do, and I'm both. I don't feel like I'm a workaholic. You might have a shit day, but then you do a show like Whyte vs. Parker and you know it's the greatest sport in the world. I live for what I do.

One of Hearn's recent U.S. signings is unbeaten middleweight contender Demetrius Andrade, who is scheduled to challenge Billy Joe Saunders for the WBO title on October 20.

"Without boxing in my life, I wouldn't have as good a life. It's not about the money, it's about the family legacy we've created at Matchroom. My goal is to be better than my dad. I'm going to be in that Hall of Fame, like he is ... He did Old Trafford (Nigel Benn-Chris Eubank) and I did (Carl) Froch-(George) Groves at Wembley. I then did AJ-Klitschko. It's about raising the bar; that's my personal drive – to create my own legacy in the family business. To try and take Matchroom to a level it's never been to before. The U.S. deal is part of that. There'll be announcements over the next five weeks about further deals and events in new countries. Our 36 events a year will quickly become 50 events a year. We will have a show a week all around the world."

It has meant thoughts about being fitter. Hearn runs for 25-45 minutes a few times a week, and revealed that three generations above him had issues with their heart. "My dad had a heart attack at 45. His dad died at 45, his dad died at 44, so I'm really looking forward to the next few years," he added sardonically. "I run to keep my weight down, try to stay healthy and not make the same mistakes of my predecessors. The last few months I've looked at myself and said I need to invest in my health. I like to work out, but when you're doing the amount of traveling that I'm doing, it's almost impossible. It's a bit like a fighter; in order to get longevity, you've got to keep yourself in shape. It's up to me to stay healthy. I don't smoke, I'm not a big drinker. I know with the stress I'm under and the workload I've got, if I'm not fit and healthy, I won't be able to do it forever. I could do this by swanning around. But to put in what I'm putting in now and to not stay fit, it would kill me."

With Joshua the key player, Hearn may have to keep him winning, or at least not losing more than once or twice. "It's heavyweight boxing and it can change with one punch. A loss doesn't define you. A loss can sometimes open up an incredible career and legacy. Great heavyweights have been beaten and come back to regain their titles; that's part of the journey. It's not just about keeping AJ safe and winning. He wants a legacy. DAZN don't want him just knocking people over. They want real fights and AJ wants real fights. We appreciate that AJ could lose along the way. He could lose, but he could win a rematch and be even bigger."

Hearn also revealed, tellingly, that a fire had been lit under him when he visited Blavatnik's home, valued at £200 million, with Joshua. "It was fascinating. It was a 'wow' moment. We've all seen nice houses, but it wasn't the house; it was the way he spoke – the passion about the project, his vision and his financial aggressiveness. He has a plan and it's working.

"I'LL BE FOUR OR FIVE TIMES MORE ECCENTRIC AND ARROGANT. I'LL BE A BIT MORE CONTROVERSIAL AS WE LAUNCH."

"Myself and AJ went to his house in Kensington, next to Prince William. It was quite an experience. He's a hugely knowledgeable man and is someone who makes you feel like this is going to work, and it doesn't matter what it takes. He saw the vision with Spotify and now has a huge amount of investment in the Perform Group. He just looked us in the eye and said, 'You know this is going to work, don't you? Trust me.' I know with his reputation, wealth, his vision, the right partners and rights holders, this is going to work."

Blavatnik, of course, has been a heavy investor in the business and entertainment sectors. "He sees the future; he's seen the future of broadcasting. And it's not just him. ESPN have done the same thing. Showtime and HBO are working on their digital services. Look at Netflix; they're worth more than Disney. They've got 120 million subscribers worldwide. His plan is to be the Netflix of sport. When you're as aggressive as he is, and when you have the pockets he has and the incredible team he has working for him, I would back him every day of the week. I don't see this as a risk for us, I see this as an opportunity."

The key, of course, will be signing major names. And behind the scenes, he will not-stop working. "Jumping ship to DAZN is not a risk, it's a reward. Fighters will see that as time goes on. They pay more money than anyone else and are with the best promotion in the world and on a platform that will drive up your profile and invest in you."

Blavatnik is no boxing connoisseur, but he knows that fights sell, that major fight nights resonate in the sports entertainment market. "He knew who Anthony Joshua was, obviously," said Hearn. "I wouldn't say he's a boxing man, but he wants big fights, big nights. They want to see huge nights and huge fights on their platform. They know it will take time, but it'll happen sooner rather than later.

"The most important thing for us when we selected our U.S. partner was a huge budget and a huge number of dates. A company that will let us build the platform from the ground up – the music, the production, the commentators, the social media, the feel – everything. Matchroom and DAZN have to be in synergy. We're similar because we're both cool, high tech and penetrating a huge audience. We want to keep within the traditional nature of the sport, but we want to be new, too.

"We have a huge job ahead of us, because we're up against it and people want to see us fail. It's easy to mug Matchroom and DAZN off. But if you've got the balls to move away from the traditional platforms, you'll be rewarded in spades. You've got to have the balls to believe in us and if you do, you will be royally rewarded."

Gareth A Davies is Boxing Correspondent for the London Telegraph.

TAYLOR MADE

JOSH TAYLOR HAS DONE NOTHING BUT IMPRESS SINCE PICKING UP A PAIR OF GLOVES, AND THE FAST-RISING 140-POUNDER IS NOW WITHIN REACH OF GREATNESS

By **Tom Gray**

The young boy sat quietly and watched.

It was summer 2005 and "Amazing" Alex Arthur, the reigning British and Commonwealth junior lightweight champion, went through the motions during a media day at a local sports center. In a few weeks, Arthur would be challenging Russia's Boris Sinitsin for the European championship and, all going to plan, the talented boxer-puncher from Edinburgh, Scotland, would hopefully be challenging for world honors.

Media days come as standard on and around top level. Fighters just loosen up with some shadowboxing or they might hit a heavy bag. You would consider it a bonus if you're treated to some mitt work or a fancy skipping routine. It's nothing more than an appropriate setting for interview opportunities. However, regardless of the constant repetition and the lack of entertainment, the young boy at the side of the hall was completely transfixed.

"Normally young guys will hit a bag and do something, but he just sat and didn't move," recalled Arthur, who would reign briefly as the WBO junior lightweight titleholder. "He watched all the training and the media stuff and was maybe a bit in awe with all the cameras. Eventually I said to him, 'Look, you're getting on my nerves sitting doing nothing. I'd rather you got up to some mischief. Go and grab a pair of gloves.'

"The next thing, he starts hitting the bag and he looked like he'd been boxing for years. I was like, 'For goodness sake, wee man, where did that come from?' He said, 'Well, I do Taekwondo, but I don't really like kicking; I just like punching.' I said, 'Well, you sure can punch,' and I told him to come back the next day. Honestly, within a few weeks, he was out doing roadwork and sparring with me. He was there through full training camps."

The young boy was Josh Taylor, who is now firmly established as one of the best junior welterweights in the world. As of publication time, the Scotsman was ranked No.2 by The Ring at 140 pounds and will campaign in the second season of the World Boxing Super Series tournament, which is scheduled to begin before year's end.

For as long as he can remember, Taylor has enjoyed combat. Small in stature during his formative years at school, bullies occasionally targeted what they perceived to be easy pickings. That plan would soon backfire and the bully would end up being bullied straight back. Pretty soon, the young Taylor found the Korean martial art of Taekwondo and excelled, receiving his black belt and winning a British championship as a teenager.

However, it was that almost pre-ordained meeting with Arthur at the sports center where his mother worked that would change his life forever. Encouraged to take up the sport in earnest, Taylor began training at 14 years old and later made the transition to the Lochend Boxing Club, which was run by Terry McCormack. The eager young southpaw progressed rapidly and caught the attention of all the right people, a narrative that has remained with him to the present day.

"After winning the Scottish title, I went abroad to compete with only 36 fights on my club card. All the rest were internationals," said Taylor in relation to his rapid ascent. "I had something like 130, 140 international fights. I went all over the world, multinational tournaments, winning medals everywhere. You see every kind of style, every boxing stance, so you're always learning and adapting. It also matures you. I've seen all kinds of cultures and different ways of life. That's been great for me outside of boxing.

"I was ready to turn professional at 19 in terms of ability, but I just didn't feel ready physically. I didn't have the strength I needed. I was too weak. I said to myself, 'I'm going to box grown men with little gloves on, and I'm just not ready yet.' I decided to stay amateur until after the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. I'd matured by then and was hurting opponents in almost every fight. I turned professional after that, and it was the perfect time. I believe I can get any style thrown at me and I can adapt."

Taylor had represented Team GB at the London 2012 Olympics, the first Scotsman to do since Dick McTaggart claimed gold at the

1956 Games in Melbourne. He was disappointed following a loss to Italian amateur star and No. 2 seed Domenico Valentino, but it was his performance at the aforementioned Commonwealth Games in 2014 that really turned heads. Taylor had moved up from lightweight to light welterweight, and his attractive combination punching was now juxtaposed alongside strength and explosiveness.

He took gold and kicked – or rather punched – open the door to professional stardom.

Cyclone Promotions, headed by former WBA featherweight champion Barry McGuigan, knew what it had when they signed the 24-year-old Taylor. There would be no prolonged professional learning curve for the exciting boxer-puncher. As well as his international amateur experience, Taylor had competed with the "British Lionhearts" in the World Series of Boxing, which is considered an almost perfect bridge between the amateur and pro game.

Trained by acclaimed coach Shane McGuigan, the Scotsman won his first eight fights, seven by knockout, before defeating Warren Joubert for the 140-pound Commonwealth championship. Taylor was moving fast, but many insiders were still surprised when he was matched against the unbeaten and bombastic power-puncher Ohara Davies. Experts were split on who would prevail when the pair met at the Braehead Arena in Glasgow on July 8, 2017.

"I always knew it wasn't a 50-50 fight," said Taylor, aghast. "In terms of skills and intelligence, I was miles ahead of him in every single department. He had the big name, the big profile and he was well-known for his mouth and punching power. But I knew he would fall apart against someone with boxing skill. As soon as I seen him mouth off on Twitter, I said to Barry and Shane, 'Get that fight made now, because I will absolutely spank him.' A lot of people didn't believe me, but I said, 'This guy is shit. He can punch, but he can't box and he's got slow feet.' I've sparred middleweights, so punching power doesn't bother me. Davies was an easy fight, but it was great for my profile. It was the fight that got everyone talking."

Taylor dropped Davies twice and stopped him in seven. The performance was nearly flawless and resonated on both sides of the Atlantic. With just 10 fights under his belt, the Edinburgh man broke into this publication's top 10 at junior welterweight (entering at No. 9) and made the leap from prospect to contender. Even the most revered members of the British fight fraternity knew they had a potential superstar in their midst.

"He is a very talented fighter, very skillful," said former Ring and IBF junior welterweight champion Ricky Hatton. "He's been brought through with the right opposition at the right time and he's in a good camp with the McGuigans. Shane, despite being young in years, is an extremely talented coach, one of the best tactically in the country, and you'll have Barry sticking his head around the corner when he's needed. Barry knows how a fighter should be brought along and when he needs to be stepped up.

"I've met Josh several times and he's a lovely guy, but he has that bit of devil inside of him. You need that nastiness, but sometimes you've got to put the boxing brain in front of the intensity. When I first turned professional, I went at my opponents like they'd stole my dinner money, and I suffered a lot of cuts. My trainer told me those cuts were happening because I was too ragged, too aggressive, and that could shorten my career. You need to think about your attacks; use your jab, feint on the way in and use the subtleties."

And Taylor needed almost every fistic nuance he'd learned through the years in his most recent outing on June 23. After becoming the first fighter to knock out former IBF lightweight titleholder Miguel Vazquez, Taylor was matched against Viktor Postol. Despite being relatively inactive, the Ukrainian technician was still regarded as one of the best 140-pound fighters in the world. Postol was unbeaten over an eight-year professional career when he knocked out the hard-hitting Lucas Matthysse to claim the vacant WBC junior welterweight title in 2015. In July of the following year, Postol fell way short in a unification showdown with pound-for-pound star Terence Crawford, but that is no disgrace.

The 34-year-old contender ventured to Glasgow full of fight, and although the scorecards of his unanimous decision defeat to Taylor were wide, that didn't tell the story of what became a grueling and highly competitive prizefight.

"He caught me with a left uppercut and I thought, 'Right, that's a good shot,'" recalled Taylor, who was taken 12 rounds for the first time in his career. "I went to pull out, but I pulled out with my hands down, which is a mistake. I lost concentration and he caught me with another two shots. I thought, 'Fuck!' You can't switch off at the highest level, and that was a big lesson I learned. But I adapted when Shane told me to put it on him. He told me to go through the gears, fight at a fast pace and work off the jab. That's when I started hitting him with left hands and other big shots.

"I was confident that I could go 12 rounds, because I've done it in the gym. It was the pace of the Postol fight that was unbelievable – it was a red-hot pace – but I honestly felt that I could have gone 15 rounds. That's how fit I was. I was in great condition and that's further testament to Postol, the shape he must have been in. His interpreter actually said to me the next day that he was in better shape for me than he was for Crawford. He had a long time to prepare and got himself in the best shape possible, and I believe that, because I hit him with some great shots."

The shot of the night was a massive left hand from Taylor that floored the ex-champion in Round 10. The knockdown wasn't required, but

Josh Taylor has an excellent rapport with his trainer, Sean McGuigan, the son of his promoter, Barry McGuigan.

it was an exclamation point on an extremely important victory. After winning what was officially a WBC final eliminator, the assumption was that Taylor would face off against that organization's titleholder, fellow London 2012 Olympian Jose Ramirez from California.

However, that showdown will have to wait.

Shortly after posting a career-best victory, Taylor changed direction and signed up for the WBSS tournament at 140 pounds. The other participants will be Kiryl Relikh, Regis Prograis, Terry Flanagan, Eduard Troyanovsky, Anthony Yigit, Ivan Baranchyk and the man whom Taylor will meet first, unbeaten American Ryan "Blue Chip" Martin.

"I'm not going to give you the game plan, because (Martin) is going to be reading this and he'll say to himself, 'I'll need to start working on this, and I'll need to start working on that,'" laughed Taylor when asked what weaknesses he'd detected in his first-round opponent.

"I hadn't seen him fight when we went over to Russia for the gala draw, but once the match was set, I had a look at him. He's a solid all-rounder. He's as tall as me, he's got fast hands and he can do everything quite well. He's a good fighter, and I think this a tough fight, to be honest. I'm going to have to train hard and make sure that I'm at my best. If I'm not at my best, he could come away with a victory, and that upsets my goals. He's in the way of me accomplishing what I want to accomplish."

Taylor (13-0, 11 KOs) reels off what he dreams of achieving in his career with youthful exuberance. Winning the WBSS is front and center, and both Arthur and Hatton believe he is more than capable of doing it. If that comes to fruition, Taylor would be the IBF, WBA and, most likely, Ring champion at junior welterweight. He would then look to become Scotland's first undisputed champion since the great Ken Buchanan, his boxing idol, who also happens to hail from Edinburgh.

"In 20 years, I think we'll look back at Josh as one of the best Scottish fighters ever," said Arthur without hesitation. "Barring an act of God or a serious injury, I think that's a foregone conclusion. Can he become the best or the greatest? That remains to be seen. There's still a long way to go. I'd like to say he'll become the greatest Scottish fighter we've ever had. I'd like him to show the world that Scotland has great boxers, because we do. We always have and we always will. But we maybe just lack that worldwide recognition. Josh could be the one who gets that for us."

Taylor is no longer the young boy looking on at the side. "The Tartan Tornado" is very close to having the boxing world at his feet.

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for THE RING. Follow him on Twitter: @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

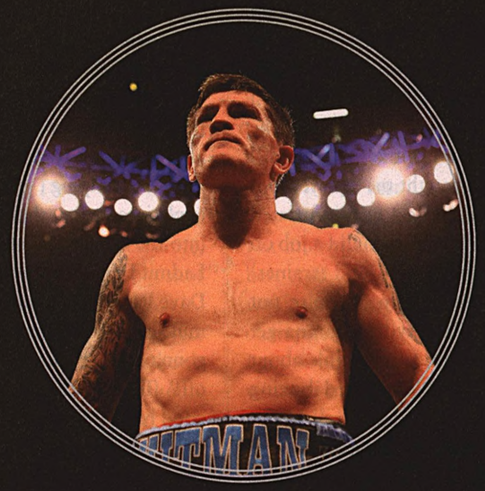
Former junior welterweight champ Ricky Hatton was Britain's most popular prizefighter of the 2000s and one of the most beloved of all time.

JOHN WALTON

THE HITLIST

RICKY HATTON RELIVES SIX OF THE VICTORIES THAT SHAPED HIS LEGACY

By **Tom Gray**



Deafening noise, violent combat and – more than likely – plenty of blood. These were the hallmarks of a Ricky Hatton fight when Manchester's finest thrashed his way through the world level during the prime of his career. As a child, Hatton grew up in a working class family, playing soccer on the streets, but as a professional prizefighter, he sold out 20,000 seats at the Manchester Arena and took 30,000 frenzied fans to Las Vegas.

The former two-weight world champion did have his handicaps. Hatton had fragile skin around the eyes, he was lacking in terms of height and reach and he was also in the habit of going several divisions above junior welterweight when out of training. However, the high-tempo pressure-puncher made up for that with a fierce work ethic in the gym and a savage and relentless attack when the opening bell sounded.

You don't know what you had until it's gone, and Hatton's departure from boxing in 2012 certainly left a void. I was in attendance the night "The Hitman" defeated Kostya Tszyu for the junior welterweight championship in June 2005 and, in my opinion, the atmosphere remains unmatched to this day. Four years later, I looked on as Hatton surrendered 140-pound dominance to Manny Pacquiao by second-round knockout in Las Vegas. The crushing defeat didn't matter to his U.K. brethren, who continued to cheer wildly for the deposed champ long after he exited the arena.

This was a hero that fight fans could identify with, and they rewarded him with unending loyalty.

Now 39 years old, the ex-champion is a successful trainer. Hatton took Zhanat Zhakiyanov to the WBA bantamweight title in 2017, and Sergey Rabchenko claimed a European championship at junior middleweight under his guidance. Hatton also coaches his 18-year-old son, Campbell, who plans to turn professional sometime in 2019.

In an attempt to uncover the essence of Hatton's legacy, we had him recall some memories from six of his most notable victories. »

↑ JON THAXTON

Date/Venue: Oct. 21, 2000/Conference Centre, Wembley, London
Titles: Vacant British junior welterweight

"I was cut in the first 10 seconds and I thought I'd blown it. Jon Thaxton was a very tough fighter and he was very strong. But (cutman) Mick Williamson did a fantastic job in the corner, keeping that cut closed. It was so bad, and Jon Thaxton came through a lot of punishment because my eye was almost hanging out and that spurred him on. He thought, 'If I just stay in here a little longer, I might win this!' Jon ended up with three cuts and it was a bloodbath. We were both getting stitched up afterwards and Jon said, 'That was a good fight, Rick!' And I said, 'Yeah, brilliant, Jon.' He said, 'We'll have to do it again!' And I told him to fuck off. (laughs) Jon is one of boxing's nice guys – he's doing a bit of coaching now. Brilliant guy!"

RESULT: HATTON UD 12

↓ EAMONN MAGEE

Date/Venue: June 1, 2002/M.E.N Arena, Manchester
Titles: Non-title bout

"It was the first time I was ever knocked down. It was also the first time in my career that someone taunted me. Magee said, 'You're nothing but a kid. You've not fought anyone. I'm gonna knock you out,' and he really got under my skin. And it was clear from the first bell that was his plan all along. I ran at him like a headless chicken, and he knocked me down in the first round. I wasn't hurt; he caught me square, so it had the opposite effect and infuriated me even more. Magee then did a job on me in the second round and (trainer) Billy Graham said to me, 'You're not only gonna get beat, you're gonna get knocked out if you don't think about what you're doing!' I started boxing a bit after that and I won well in the end, but that fight taught me to keep my composure."

RESULT: HATTON UD 12

↑ KOSTYA TSZYU

Date/Venue: June 4, 2005/M.E.N Arena, Manchester
Titles: Ring and IBF junior welterweight

"The one thing I'll never forget is the low blow. Kostya caught me low twice and the referee didn't warn him, then he went low again. In my mind, in my boxing brain, I said to myself, 'It's clear to see that he's given me three low blows. If I give him one, then the referee can't take a point off me.' So I took a run up and gave it everything I had, and he went down. I remember Russell Crowe jumping up and throwing expletives at me, shall we say. I looked into the crowd and shouted, 'Fuck off!' I admit I did it deliberately, but (referee) Dave Parris was in a tricky position. He must have said to himself, 'This crowd is gonna string me up alive if I take a point off!' To me, though, that's having a good boxing brain. Yes, I was a hundred miles per hour at times, but I used my common sense there."

RESULT: HATTON TKO 11

↓ CARLOS MAUSSA

Date/Venue: Nov. 26, 2005/Sheffield Arena, Sheffield
Titles: Ring, IBF and WBA junior welterweight

"This was cuts again. Carlos Maussa was very tough and he was awkward. Normally when you see a fighter dip left, you know a left hook's coming. When he dips right, you know a right hook's coming. He was very unorthodox and difficult to read. Not only did I not know what he was going to throw next, I don't think he did. He could hit hard, though, and he'd stopped Vivian Harris to win the (WBA) title. Anyway, I was winning the fight comfortably, but the two cuts I had were horrendous. I got a bit desperate, but I kept missing him with the big shot by inches. In the end, I thought, 'Fuck it,' and I actually took a run up, with my feet coming off the floor, and this left hook landed. It was one of the best knockouts of my career, and I think it would have knocked a horse out."

RESULT: HATTON KO 9

↑ LUIS COLLAZO

Date/Venue: May 13, 2006/TD Banknorth Gardens, Boston
Titles: WBA welterweight

"I always wanted to do what my heroes done and become a two-weight world champion. I was able to achieve that, but Billy Graham tried to talk me out of it because I was only 5-foot-6 and, for as long as I had a hole in my backside, I was never a welterweight. At junior welterweight, I could manhandle fighters and push them about, but it was a lot harder at 147 pounds. I got Luis down in the first 10 seconds because I was a hard-hitting light welterweight. But after that, he was able to take my best stuff and come back at me, which was something even a formidable champion like Kostya Tszyu couldn't do. I got through it and I think I deserved to win, but it was an extremely hard fight and I think the knockdown won it for me. That was the reason I moved back down to light welter. Luis did everything except put me down in the last round."

RESULT: HATTON UD 12

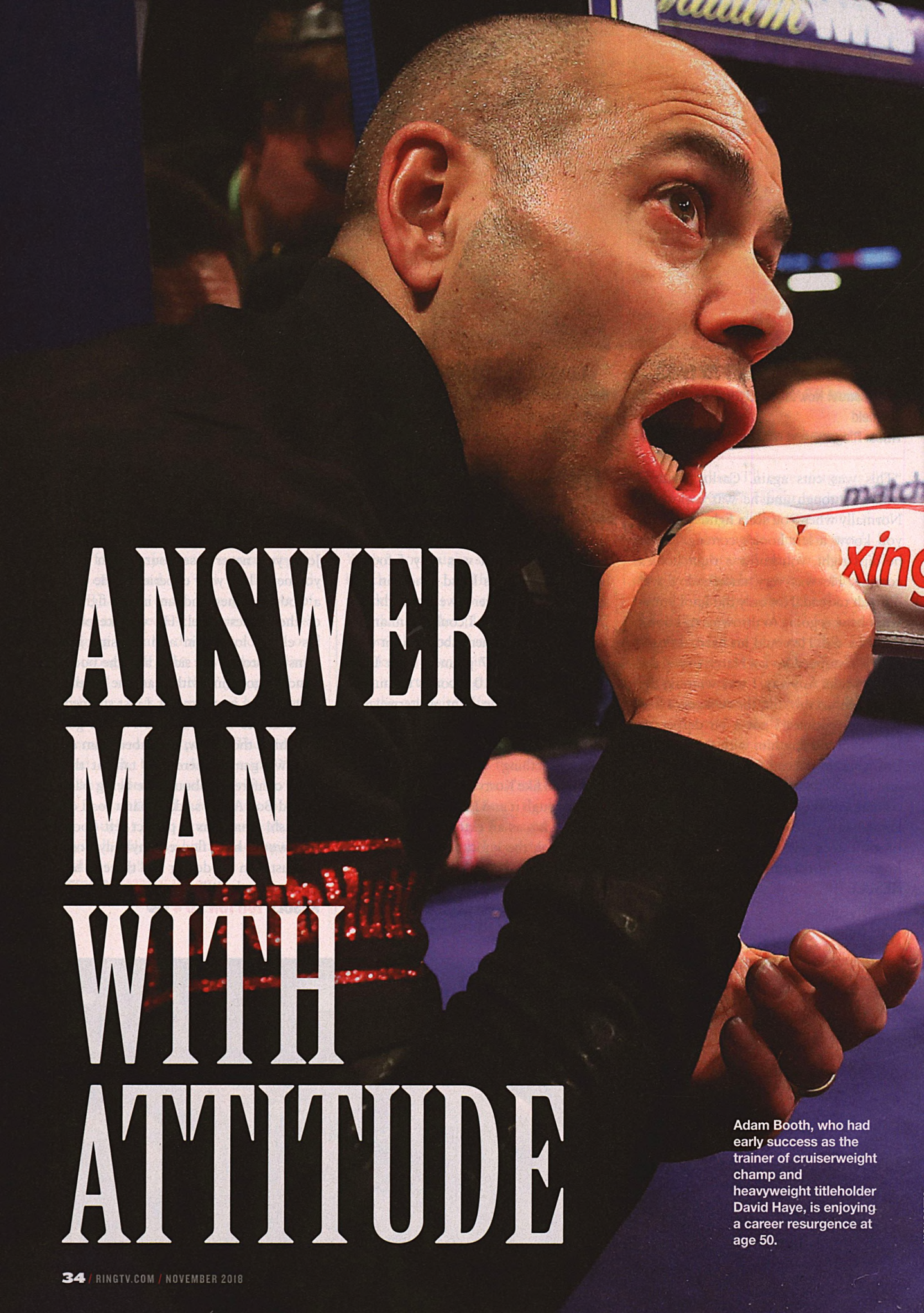
↓ JOSE LUIS CASTILLO

Date/ Venue: June 23, 2007/ Thomas & Mack Center, Las Vegas
Titles: Ring junior welterweight

"A lot of people were saying Castillo had seen better days, and that was a fair shout. But in a close-quarters fight, like it was always gonna be between me and Jose, you never lose your punch and you never lose your experience. He was a body-puncher and an inside fighter of the highest level. He was keeping his elbow locked in and crossing his arms to protect his sides, and the body punch I got him with was one of the best I threw in my career. I just stepped three inches to the left so I could get in behind the elbow, and I beat him at his own game. There was talk at the press conference about Jose being past it, and Bob Arum said, 'What a load of rubbish! That was a perfect left hook that would have floored anybody. Jose has just seen the doctor and three of his ribs are cracked!'"

RESULT: HATTON KO 4

ANSWER MAN WITH ATTITUDE



Adam Booth, who had early success as the trainer of cruiserweight champ and heavyweight titleholder David Haye, is enjoying a career resurgence at age 50.

ADAM BOOTH HAS BECOME A TOP TRAINER BY ASKING THE TOUGH QUESTIONS OF HIS FIGHTERS, BOXING INSIDERS AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, HIMSELF

By **Gareth A Davies**

Adam Booth has always had the ability to think outside the box, to react in the moment, to see the nuance and the nonsense. It has assisted him well in the boxing business, given him an acumen for contracts as well as contests. He also has the ability to make people feel special. And when that comes to his fighters, it has borne fruit – and friendship – with three world champions: former heavyweight and cruiserweight David Haye, middleweight Andy Lee and bantamweight Ryan Burnett. (Booth also trained super middleweight George Groves, but the WBA beltholder won his world title under Shane McGuigan.)

Now in his 50th year, Booth – nicknamed affectionately by the British media as "the Dark Lord" – is on something of a second run in boxing. Had he given up, his would have been a talent wasted.

Born in London, Booth's baptism into boxing began when his stepdad, Tom, "dragged me into Croydon ABC (amateur boxing club) when I was 13." He boxed as an amateur, turned pro under Mickey Duff and was training with Dean Powell for his first professional fight when he broke his leg playing football (soccer).

"That was the problem," explained Booth. "I had ability with both boxing and football, and I got stuck between the two. The reason why I ended up playing that day when I broke my leg was I didn't have any money. I was skint. I used to get paid to play for this team and the fella called me up asking if I could play Saturday. I needed a bit of cash, played, and that was it."

He was a midfielder. He even tried out for Tottenham Hotspur Football Club. "I remember going up to Tottenham and playing terribly. That was it; that was the only trial I had. I stopped playing football to only box at around the age of 16. And then went back to it when I was older."

Belfast featherweight prospect Michael Conlan is one of Booth's new pupils.

Was he a decent player? "I had a bit of an attitude." That is Booth in a nutshell. Bit of an attitude. Naturally suspicious. Not in a bad way, but in terms of asking questions. It has served him well in boxing.

"We live in a twisted reality we're trying to deconstruct. I find it easier to strip things down to basics, look at us in our natural environment, our natural habitat, and try and find solutions from there."

He has always had this attitude, an awareness of life. "There has to be discipline involved in this sport. There has to be discipline involved in life. A fight is an artificial scenario. Normally to have a fight it's an instinctive thing – someone has threatened your tribe or taken your food. It would be an immediate thing. We have the chemicals that make us do that – the fight-or-flight syndrome. We have adrenaline, testosterone – all these things. But what we do in this sport and combat sports is two fellas shake hands, sign the contract and say we'll see each other in six weeks' time and we'll have a fight. From the get-go it's not a natural thing.

"My point is there has to be discipline and structure, because you've got to predict a peak. That peak is on that night at that time. With different characters, you have some with discipline or without discipline. There's two ways of going about it. Either you train the fighter to fight the way you go about it and you don't train the ones who don't think like you, or you try and understand each one and what disciplines need to be done within each character."

Looking back on 20 years in the business, it began with David Haye. "It felt a bit like a baptism of fire into the boxing business. I was in my mid-20s when I started training David. When I started training him, he was 17. Naturally we didn't trust people, and I ended up being his manager, his coach and ultimately his promoter for his professional career.

"I think I learned a lot about the business, from the gym to the TV networks, figuring a way through it. I met good people and bad people, some people who would constantly lie and others who would tell the truth. But they all wear the same

face, and that was the learning curve. I feel it was a valuable experience.

"I always ask, 'Why?' I never accept what's said to me, don't accept things at face value and I understand people normally act to fit their own agenda. They want to impose their will on a scenario, so I always ask why. I do that with my training method, even today. If I'm doing something and I'm not sure it's working, I try and find another way of reaching the same result. I'm always questioning what I'm doing, and always questioning what others do and why they do it."

Groves, of course, was part of the Booth-Haye trajectory, before going his own way with Paddy Fitzpatrick and then McGuigan. "George was very disciplined and very driven to train. You didn't have to tell George twice. If you told George to go for a 45-minute hill sprint, you'd walk away knowing he would at least do what you asked him – maybe even a little bit more. With George you had to make sure there was no chocolate near him. You had to keep checking his teeth. But with David I had to come up with 101 different ways to tell him to go for a run."

"I'M ALWAYS QUESTIONING WHAT I'M DOING, AND ALWAYS QUESTIONING WHAT OTHERS DO AND WHY THEY DO IT."

How should David Haye's career be remembered? "David should be remembered as Britain's greatest-ever cruiserweight. An exciting fighter who had an attractive, explosive style. He was as entertaining as he needed to be. At heavyweight he was a very explosive, small heavyweight competing with the biggest of them all."

Booth was delighted to see Groves defeat Fedor Chudinov and win a world title, and was impressed by Groves' contest against Chris Eubank Jr., whom he trained briefly. Victory for Groves over Callum Smith in the World Boxing Super Series 168-pound

Booth has a special place in his heart for Haye (above left) and former middleweight standout Andy Lee (opposite page), who he describes as an "incredible man."

final will depend, reckons Booth, "on the condition of George's left shoulder" and what Smith can show, having "postured that he can be a top-level super middleweight".

There has been delight over the years. "When Andy Lee won the world title, it was one of my highlights of boxing. If you're fortunate enough to know Andy, you'll know how much of an incredible man he is. To know him as a friend is a privilege. To have helped him get a world title is incredible. We are very close and always will be."

Latterly, Booth has teamed up with three terrific young fighters: Burnett, Josh Kelly and Michael Conlan. "I was struggling to get Andy fighting and David Haye had retired. I had one eye on leaving boxing, looking to do something else. And then Ryan Burnett rocks up into the gym and all of a sudden develops into this fighter. We became close and it's a bit like the Andy Lee scenario. Ryan reignited my passion for being a coach.

"Then I started saying to myself, 'Let's see how Ryan's career goes.' Ryan becomes world champion, and in the process of him becoming world champion, (welterweight prospect) Josh Kelly comes along. He's an exceptional talent and an amazing young guy. Josh and Ryan together really feed my enthusiasm for being a coach."

And then there were three... "Yes, and then along comes (Irish Olympian and featherweight prospect) Michael Conlan, who I didn't really know much about. I was curious about seeing how he was to work with. That first spar showed me the type of man he is. I've got a lot of time for him, and I like who he is. He can obviously fight, because you don't achieve what you can in the amateurs if you can't fight. There's a lot to work with there, but his work ethic is second to none." The key is that Booth has got "the desire back again."

"Fighters say it, but if you do anything for long enough, regardless of who you are, you take it for granted. These three have reignited my passion for being a coach who can read a contract."

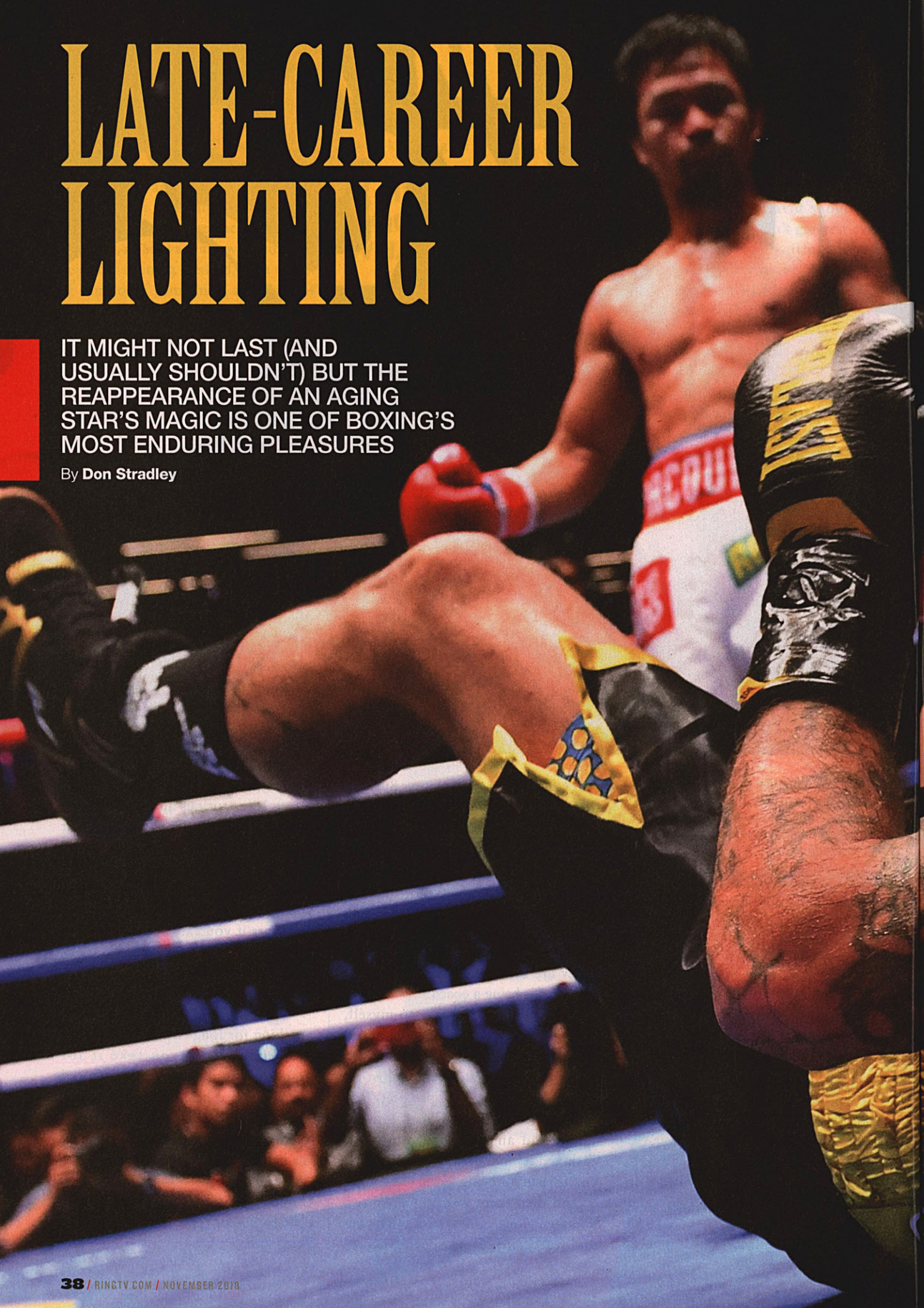
The Dark Lord is back. And boxing is a better place for it. RING

Gareth A Davies is boxing correspondent for The London Telegraph.

LATE-CAREER LIGHTING

IT MIGHT NOT LAST (AND USUALLY SHOULDN'T) BUT THE REAPPEARANCE OF AN AGING STAR'S MAGIC IS ONE OF BOXING'S MOST ENDURING PLEASURES

By **Don Stradley**



Manny Pacquiao looks down on the fallen Lucas Matthysse, whom he dropped three times en route to a seventh-round stoppage on July 15 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Even the most cynical of boxing people get a bit excited when an aging legend shows he can still handle himself in the ring. Recent proof of this was Manny Pacquiao's victory over Lucas Matthysse in Kuala Lumpur. It didn't matter that Matthysse spent so much of the fight on one knee as if awaiting knighthood. The news was that 39-year-old Pacquiao fought a smart, measured fight, couldn't miss with his left and won by a KO, just like in the old days, back when Bill Clinton was in office. Yes, he's been around that long.

Now comes the speculation game. What will Pacquiao do now that he has, to borrow a much-abused phrase, turned back the clock? If history tells us anything, and it screams quite loudly if only we'd listen, such late-career lightning as Pacquiao found in Malaysia can be followed up in many different ways. Sometimes the veteran fighter returns to the spotlight, with promoters angling for his services. For a moment, he seems to be back. He may come at a cheaper price, with cheaper packaging, but he's back.

Pacquiao's reawakening is bound to be lucrative for somebody, whether or not he's the same world-beater he used to be. Resurrections, you see, are always big business. Hell, the concept serves as the basis for an entire religion. The best scenario for "Pac-Man," though, is a "one and done" deal, with a big fight to send him into retirement. More often than not, however, fighters in Pacquiao's position find themselves in a sustained coda, grinding it out in increasingly obscure locations, hoping for more of that lightning.

No less than Roberto Duran did it the second way. He was considered washed-up when he challenged Iran Barkley for the WBC middleweight title in 1989. He was 37, a former lightweight campaigning at 160, and had lost several times. Barkley was a hungry young bruiser, taller and stronger than "Manos de Piedra." Yet, Duran used every ounce of his boxing knowledge to come away with a split decision and the

title. The bout was chosen as our Fight of The Year and left us all wondering: How many lives did Duran have?

Unfortunately, the impressive victory over Barkley turned out to be Duran's last great night. He lost his next bout – a long-awaited rubber match with Ray Leonard that stunk out The Mirage in Las Vegas – and spent the next several years fighting in less than glamorous settings, occasionally serving as fodder for fighters like Vinny Paz, Hector Camacho and William Joppy, opponents he would've once ripped apart. He fought till he was 50, retiring only when a car accident forced him to quit.

Duran's win over Barkley was especially surprising after his knockout loss to Thomas Hearns in 1984, a two-round blowout that ended with Duran facedown on the canvas, as knocked out as any fighter has ever been. The fact that Barkley then beat Hearns, and rather violently at that, made Barkley seem like a monster. But Barkley had his limitations, and Hearns was always a hard one to figure – a man whose right hand seemed designed to sink battleships, yet was himself quite vulnerable.

Of course, Hearns had a late-career revival, too. It happened in 1991 when he challenged WBA light heavyweight titlist Virgil Hill, an undefeated ex-Olympian who was young and had the sort of left hook that was capable of breaking Tommy's brittle chin into a dozen pieces. Hearns, a war-torn 33, put aside his power and instead schooled Hill with an exquisite jab. His near-perfect outing was enough to win a 12-round decision and bring the title home. Unluckily, his next opponent was his old rival Barkley, who beat him on points. Hearns was never again a major factor in the sport, but he fought often, won some minor belts at cruiserweight and was always a reliable draw in his home state of Michigan.

Fellow Michigan fighter James Toney had such a strong late-career surge that he earned our Fighter of the Year award in 2003, 12 years after he'd won it in 1991. Toney was a 34-year-old butterball, but still had enough left to produce a pair of notable wins, one against Vassiliy Jirov for the IBF cruiserweight belt (a stirring decision win that was a fight-of-the-year candidate), and a stoppage of Evander Holyfield. But rather than go on to greater glories, Toney spent the rest of his career toiling in uninteresting bouts. Those years were marked by losses, failed drug tests, injuries, and even a laughable minute in the world of MMA. Despite his memorable 2003 crusade, Toney became one of those fighters we wished would disappear.

Just months before Toney beat Jirov, Mike Tyson was brought out of mothballs to face Clifford Etienne. In

Roberto Duran's bold and savvy stand against the younger, bigger, stronger Iran Barkley resulted in one of the great upsets of the 1980s.

Tyson's previous fight, Lennox Lewis had battered him into submission at the Pyramid in Memphis. This verified what many had thought, that Tyson was no longer competitive against elite heavyweights. His name was still magic at the box office, though, and the city of Memphis was glad to host his next bout. Etienne was a ruggedly built journeyman, and thought to be a proper challenge. Tyson knocked him out with one punch. Unfortunately, Tyson's return to form was a bit of a delusion. His next two bouts were disasters, including an embarrassing TKO loss to unknown Kevin McBride. Tyson left boxing and reinvented himself as an actor and raconteur.

The folks in Memphis weren't wrong to bring Tyson back; for as long as the boxing business has existed, it's been de rigueur for an old salable name to be tossed up on the marquee to tempt ticket buyers. Plus, there's always the off chance that an aging legend can still execute. Was there a shinier example of this than when Larry Holmes beat Ray Mercer in 1992? Over 40, having been outpointed twice by Michael Spinks and then stopped by Tyson, Holmes was considered just another aging heavyweight without the sense to retire. Mercer, a heavy puncher on his way to a title shot against Holyfield, was expected to win easily. By the fourth bell, however, it was clear that Holmes still had plenty of savvy, and that Mercer wasn't such a bright light after all.

Using his own version of the rope-a-dope, Holmes' strategy involved planting himself in a corner of the ring, blocking Mercer's attacks and then countering. Mercer seemed utterly befuddled, while Holmes appeared to be having fun, improvising on the spot with jabs and sucker shots. Holmes won by unanimous decision and it was he, not Mercer, who earned the shot at Holyfield (he lost on points, but fought gallantly). Holmes went on boxing for years, mostly in a Mississippi casino. Conserving his energy, fighting in spurts, tapping into a vast reservoir of shrewdness, he won far more often than he lost. No longer a top heavyweight, he simply continued doing what he loved, which was fighting for money.

Perhaps the unlikeliest fighter to experience a late-career boom was Jess Willard. The gigantic ex-champion was 41 when promoter Tex Rickard booked him to face young heavyweight prospect Floyd Johnson in 1923. The bout, which headlined the debut boxing program at Yankee Stadium, was expected to be a showcase for Johnson. Willard, his flabby old legs quivering, gradually began to look like an enormous sacrificial lamb. He had to be lifted from his stool by his handlers to begin the ninth.

After taking a beating for most of the round, Willard reached back into some distant corner of his fighting memory and launched a roundhouse right, dropping Johnson just before the bell. Then, at the end of the 11th, using what one reporter called "the brute strength of primitive man," Willard knocked Johnson to the canvas again. The younger fighter, by now semi-conscious and bleeding, had to be carried back to his corner, where the fight was immediately stopped. "Youth, take off your hat and bow low and respectfully to Age," Damon Runyon wrote for the New York American. "For days and days, the sole topic of conversation in the world of sport will be Willard's astonishing comeback."

Willard's rebirth was brief. He lost his next fight, and returned to a quiet life on his ranch.

Even John L. Sullivan, the drunken braggart who did more than any other fighter to popularize boxing in America during the late 1800s, experienced a late-career renewal. Sullivan was far removed from his reign as heavyweight champion when he undertook a series of exhibitions along the East Coast. These almost yearly events were nothing more than glorified sparring sessions; Sullivan, white-haired and grossly overweight, wasn't interested in anything resembling real competition.

In 1905, Sullivan journeyed to the Smith Opera House in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for an exhibition with a young boxer named Jim McCormick. What made this event different was that Sullivan, 46, was making noise about a comeback. Though his alcohol-ravaged body weighed nearly 280 pounds, he loudly hinted that this was a legitimate bout. It's unknown as to whether McCormick knew of Sullivan's plans, or how he felt when the old brawler waddled out for the first round throwing hard punches. In the second, Sullivan cornered McCormick and landed a right to the jaw. The sold-out crowd went into delirium as McCormick crumbled. He was unconscious for several minutes, unaware of the customers crashing across the orchestra pit to congratulate the winner.

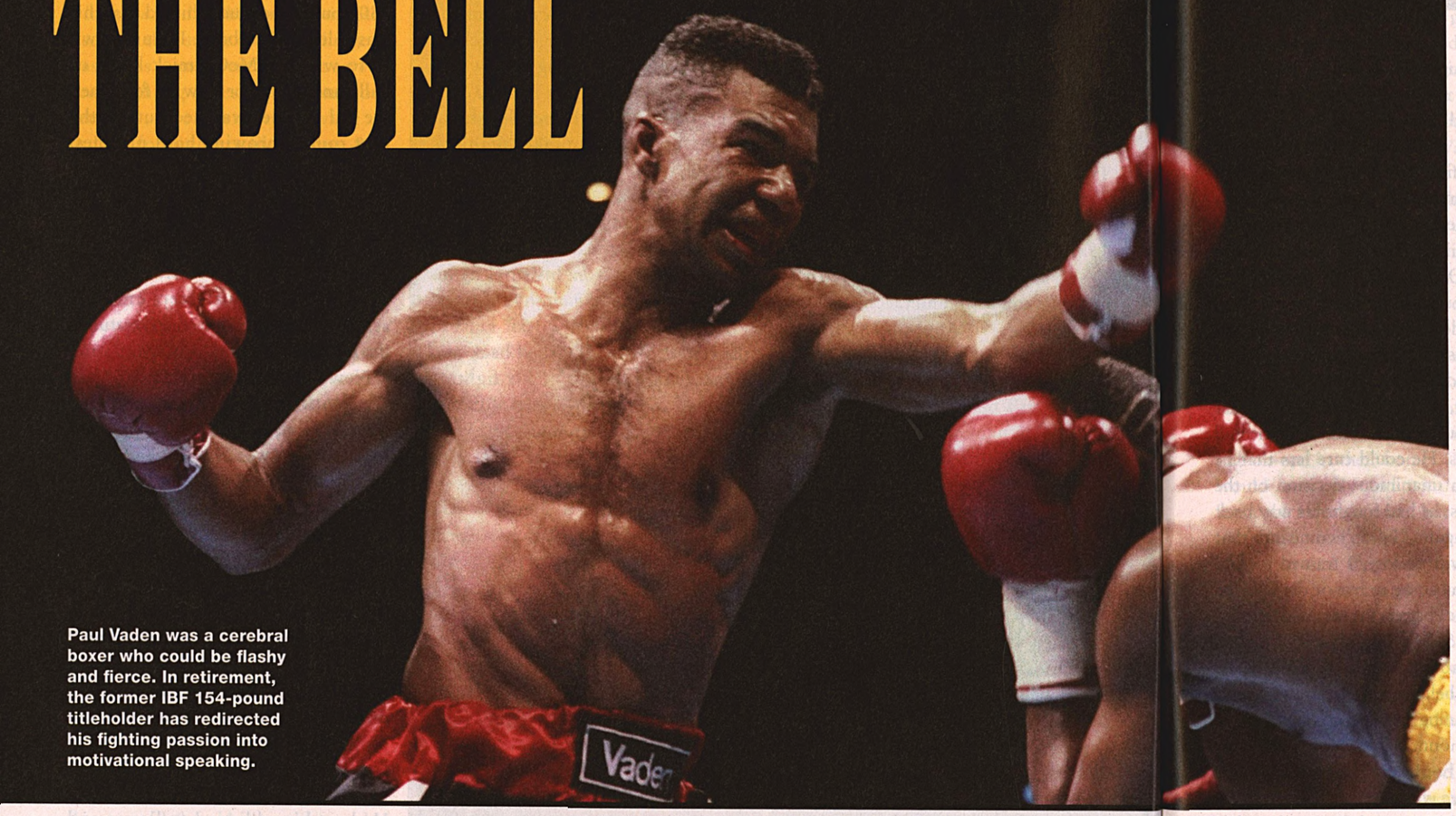
News of Sullivan's victory made the front page of his hometown Boston Globe. The headline roared that Sullivan was "In The Knockout Business Again," while Sullivan made a point of challenging any available heavyweight, including champion Jim Jeffries. The fun, however, was short-lived. Beyond the Boston city limits, most felt Sullivan was simply an eccentric blowhard. Questions were even raised about McCormick's true identity and his credentials. Most agreed that the only real battle Sullivan had ahead of him was against the demon alcohol. Eventually, Sullivan felt the same way. He beat his addiction to liquor and went on the lecture circuit to preach the virtues of living clean. He forgot his comeback. That was for the best.

While they briefly bump up an older fighter's status, most late-career rallies are merely postponements of a guy's downturn. But whether Pacquiao's future includes a major opponent or a series of handpicked challengers, he's in good company. Still, let us hope he doesn't linger on the stage. Check any fighter who hung around too long. More than likely he had some late-career success against a good opponent. This convinces a fighter that the clock is always his to turn back, the lightning always his to summon.

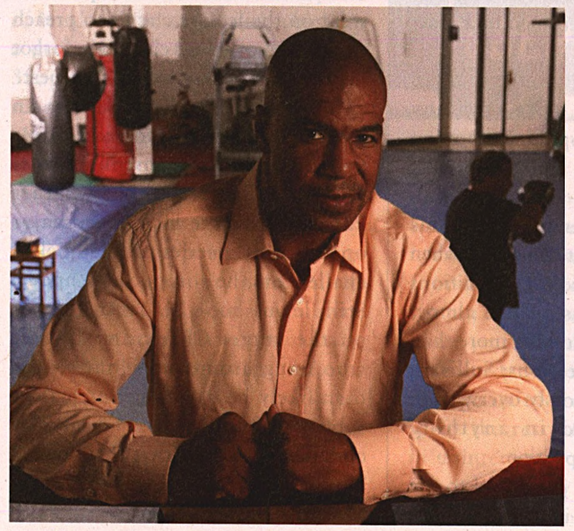
ANSWERING THE BELL

AFTER TRAGEDY IN THE RING, **PAUL VADEN** FOUND HIS CALLING IN MOTIVATING OTHERS TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY

By **Michael Montero**



Paul Vaden was a cerebral boxer who could be flashy and fierce. In retirement, the former IBF 154-pound titleholder has redirected his fighting passion into motivational speaking.



For many prizefighters, making the transition to life after boxing is difficult. Gone for good are the rush of fight night and the energy of the fans. They often find themselves looking back upon their glory days rather than living in the present. But if you ask 50-year-old Paul Vaden, he'll tell you that his best years are far ahead of him. He still lives in his hometown of San Diego, where he is a sought-after corporate mentor, motivational speaker and author. Boxing will always be a part of what he refers to as his "script," but it would only be the beginning. "Ever since I was 4 years old, I wanted to be a boxing world champion," Vaden told The Ring. "But then I wanted the rest of my script to play out. As I started to grow, I understood that there were other things I would do to impact this world. I don't know how to describe what I do today other than I help people win."

From a young age, Vaden was inspired to be beyond labels. "I have two superheroes in life: Muhammad Ali and Michael Jackson," said Vaden. "To call them just a fighter, just a singer, would be a disservice. I wasn't a fan of them; I studied them." Like many children in the 70s, Paul became enamored with Ali the instant he saw him. Watching his heroes perform and seeing the impact they made on the world made a lasting impression.

The Vaden family lived in the rough southeast section of San Diego. Paul's father, Gerald, wanted his two sons to get involved in sports to keep them out of trouble. In the summer of 1976, upon the backdrop of the Montreal Olympic Games where the American boxing team would collect five gold medals, he took his boys to the Jackie Robinson YMCA off Imperial Avenue. Inside the facility, Paul came across a boxing room that was donated by the great Archie Moore; right then and there he knew what he wanted to do. "My father gave me a two-week trial, probably thinking that I would lose interest after a couple weeks and choose to do something else," said Vaden. "But once I had found my outlet, I was all in. I would be at the gym early every day."

Vaden would go on to compile a stellar amateur record of 327-10. In 1988, he came up short qualifying for the Olympics Games in Seoul, South Korea, losing a controversial decision to eventual welterweight bronze medalist Kenneth Gould. Shortly thereafter, while still an amateur, Vaden adopted what would become his professional ring moniker when an article written about one of his bouts described it as "an ultimate performance."

"When he said I gave 'an ultimate performance,' he wasn't just talking about what I did the ring, but me being gracious and articulate outside of it," Vaden said. "I liked that word – 'ultimate' – because it had more to do with the person I was trying to become. I wanted to be seen as more than the fighter, but the whole package, like my superheroes."

After winning the national amateur championship at light middleweight in 1990, many felt Vaden was a shoe-in for the upcoming Barcelona Games in 1992. However, Paul opted to turn professional instead, feeling like many that the electronic scoring system recently adopted by the International Olympic Committee was heavily flawed. Besides, the goal he always had for his script was to become a professional boxing champion. So Vaden turned pro in 1991 and reeled off 10 quick victories over his first year. However, tragedy would strike just three days before his 11th fight as his father died of a heart attack. "It was extremely difficult, because he was so supportive of what I wanted to become," said Vaden. "But it was important that I went through with the fight, because my father would have wanted me to. I would use his death as additional inspiration to fulfilling my dream of becoming champion of the world."

In August of 1995, Vaden had his first title shot, facing Baltimore native Vincent Pettway for his IBF junior middleweight championship. A betting underdog coming in, Vaden won via 12th-round TKO, fulfilling a promise he had made to classmates back in the 3rd grade. "I made a declaration to my class that I would be world champion," said Vaden. "Looking back, I needed to become champion to add fuel to the vehicle for what I do today. Becoming a world champion, all the hard work it entails, that lends credibility to my message at public speaking events today." Instead of milking his title with optional defenses, Vaden went straight into a unification match with the great Terry Norris just four months later. A well-documented history of animosity had existed between them for years. This was not the typical played-up shoving match between fighters at a weigh-in; this was the real thing.

Although Norris was a Texas native, he trained and fought out of San Diego. "Terrible" Terry claimed that he had broken Vaden's nose during a sparring session in the early '90s, calling him a "crybaby." In retaliation, Vaden became romantically involved with Kelly Norris, Terry's wife. Both fighters traded insults through the media for years. Norris said things about Vaden's late father that enraged him; Vaden wrote a malicious poem about Norris that was posted in an issue of The Ring. "It was a really hostile environment whenever we were together," said Vaden. "Not just for us, but it was uncomfortable for everyone around us."

Boxing fans were anticipating an action-packed grudge match when they faced each other on December 16, 1995, at the Spectrum in Philadelphia, but it was not to be. Norris, an eventual inductee into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, would go on to win a one-sided decision over 12 rounds. Humbled, Vaden chose to look at this first loss as a learning experience. "When you go to the scorecards of life, I was wrong (for the affair). I believe that God is a teaching God. He picked that moment to humble me, to teach me."

Two years later, Vaden would get a crack at the WBC middleweight title against Keith Holmes. The defending beltholder dropped Vaden twice in the fourth round and once in the 11th before the fight was stopped. Having suffered his second loss as a pro and his first stoppage defeat, Paul felt he needed a break from the ring. He wanted to spend some quality time with his 1-year-old son, Dayne, and his wife, Lisa. It was during this time that he realized his ability for connecting, listening and helping people. Vaden began teaching people how to box, and he soon discovered that he loved the interpersonal part of it more than anything. "In

Vaden's first professional loss was to fellow 154-pound titleholder (and hated crosstown rival) Terry Norris (right), who scored a one-sided unanimous decision in December 1995.

the midst of a workout there are a lot of conversations and you learn about people and their lives, their problems," said Vaden. Along the way, he would share his ring stories, his struggles, how he overcame them to succeed. The message got through to his clients and relationships soon developed. Unbeknownst to him at the time, Paul was planting the seeds for his eventual work in the corporate sector. But after a year-and-a-half away from his first true love, "The Ultimate" was itching to get back into the ring. Little did Vaden know his script was about to change forever.

Paul returned to the ring in the summer of 1999, scoring a stoppage win that set him up for a bout against Stephan Johnson on November 20 at the Trump Taj Mahal in Atlantic City. The result would be tragic. After nine grueling rounds, Johnson was knocked out in the 10th and never regained consciousness. Johnson was pronounced dead 15 days later.

"I was dying inside during the torment of those two weeks," said Vaden. "When I learned that Stephan passed, it was a numbing feeling." Johnson had been briefly hospitalized and placed on medical suspension after a knockout loss to Fitz Vanderpool in Toronto earlier that year. Yet he fought twice in different jurisdictions prior to facing Vaden. According to the New Jersey State Athletic Control Board, Johnson had passed a CAT scan, an electrocardiograph and an eye test prior to the bout. Still, many wondered if accumulative head trauma had carried over into the ring on that fateful night in Atlantic City. Regardless of how it happened, one lasting image haunted Vaden. "He fought me in the ring and never opened his eyes again. Seeing him being carried out of the ring on a stretcher unconscious, I was done as a fighter. I never wanted to experience that again."

For Vaden, the Johnson tragedy topped off what had been a devastating year for him and his family. That January he had lost a cousin to suicide, and in August his cousin's father also committed suicide over a sense of guilt. All of the death in such a short time paralyzed Vaden. He didn't feel like "The Ultimate" anymore. Rather, he felt survivor's guilt and worried that he was going to be paid back in some way. "I became scared to run, scared to do anything. I thought I was going to drop dead," said Vaden. "If I had a scratchy throat, I thought it was throat cancer. If I had pain in my legs, it was multiple sclerosis. I was becoming a hypochondriac, calling my doctor all the time."

This was the point in Vaden's script where he was either going to get stuck or turn the page. In his darkest hour, he did what a fighter does; he returned to the place he had always gone for refuge. "I had to fight to find out if I still had permission to live," said Vaden. "I needed to go to the thing I had always gone to to find out my answers and try to move on. There were so many other things that I wanted to do in life."

On April 15, 2000, just months after the Johnson bout, Paul Vaden climbed back into the ring to face Jose Flores in Las Vegas. In the fifth round, Flores caught Vaden with a flush shot, hurting him, but the former champ fought back and went the full 12 rounds. He could care less that he had lost a unanimous decision on the scorecards; he had fought his way back to living again. "I didn't come into that fight to win or lose; I trained to find out if I was going to live or die," Vaden said. "The boxer in me had retired after the Stephan Johnson fight. This was not about boxing. When I heard the final bell, I knew my script was just beginning." He would never fight again, announcing his retirement after the Flores bout, yet "The Ultimate" was back. There was no more fear of death. Matters that seemed larger than life before now appeared trivial, including his previous feud with Terry Norris.

That same year, the Nevada Athletic Commission unanimously denied Norris a license to fight. He was having issues with his balance, slurred speech, and would subsequently be diagnosed with Parkinson's syndrome. "When I heard about his situation, my heart went out to him. I almost had tears in my eyes," said Vaden. "But I was also happy that they didn't give him a license, because I didn't want anything to happen to him. That opened my eyes to the fact that I cared for him, which made me realize that all of that riff-raff stuff from before wasn't that deep." Vaden bumped into Norris at a weigh-

in of all places in 2001. The men talked, shook hands and then instantly all of the drama from the past was no more. "I wish him nothing but heaven," said Vaden. "I am honored to have shared the ring with this great Hall of Famer."

With his fighting days and grievances behind him, Vaden dedicated the next chapter of his script to helping others. "When I talk about the script of my life and having an impact on others, this is how I could do it," said Vaden. "All those situations that had me paralyzed – I knew there were people that needed to hear my story to get them out of bed in the morning, to get them to push one step further." So he picked right back up where he had left off during his break from the ring a few years before, teaching people how to box again. Rather than working out in the often-intimidating confines of a boxing gym, Vaden would work with people one-on-one in their homes. There they would not only feel comfortable to learn the sweet science, but also open up about their lives. "I wanted my clients to feel they had the freedom to express if something was going on with them," said Vaden. "People need to feel like they have someone to talk to that will listen, someone who wants them to win. I never even saw myself as a boxing trainer; I wanted to be more than that."

As Vaden developed relationships with his clients, they began to tell their friends. Word spread that this former boxing champion had a knack for connecting with corporate leaders, showing them a different way to tackle problems. It was as if they were in training camp preparing for a fight, only the opponent was a merger, a stockholder meeting, a project overseas, or perhaps a family issue. One of his clients was former Qualcomm president Steve Altman, who became so impressed with Vaden that he invited him to speak at his company. Along the way, Vaden met and worked with Peter Seidler, the managing director of the San Diego Padres, Chris Lischewski, CEO of Bumble Bee Foods, and many others. Before long, Vaden was standing behind the podium at corporate functions sharing his life and loving every second of it. "I've never been nervous about public speaking," said Vaden, "I see it as telling a story through conversation that I'm going to dominate. What I actually get nervous about is the technical side of things, but never what's going to come from my mouth and heart."

Beyond working with corporate executives, Vaden works with young people as well. He has spoken at the University of California, San Diego State, Evergreen State College and other schools. He sits on the board of directors at the National Conflict Resolution Center, is the board president of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and is heavily involved in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. Dayne, his now-21-year-old son, is his pride and joy, and has been able to attend several of his speaking engagements. "I hope he's impacted by his dad's ability to convey a universal message and give people higher hope," said Vaden. Although Paul and Lisa divorced in 2009, they stay in contact and have a good relationship. "I'm forever indebted to her," said Vaden. "She gave me the greatest gift I'll ever receive, our son Dayne. I'd do anything for her."

In 2013, Vaden wrote a book named *Answer the Bell*, which focuses on giving people the skills to learn, grow and improve their lives every day. "*Answer the Bell* is about never relenting," said Vaden. "When things are against you and the weight is too heavy, you still get up. There is always sunshine behind that dark cloud. But you never get the answer in these situations if you don't answer the bell. If you don't, you become a 'coulda, woulda, shoulda.' You live a life of speculating; you never get past that dark cloud." On the back cover of the book there is a statement from none other than former Qualcomm president Steve Altman expressing his gratitude for Paul's friendship.

In 2016, a documentary short film chronicling Vaden's life was released. *Vaden Versus* contained archival footage from Paul's career as well as segments with his former trainer Abel Sanchez, HBO's Jim Lampley and Hall of Fame journalist Steve Farhood, among others. The documentary features the day Vaden was inducted into the Breitbard Hall of Fame, which honors athletes who have either excelled in sports in San Diego or native San Diegans who have excelled in sports elsewhere. Paul received his induction at the 70th annual "Salute to the Champions" dinner in downtown San Diego; it was one of the proudest moments of his entire athletic career. The film would go on to air at several festivals throughout America and win the Platinum Reel Award at the Nevada Film Festival.

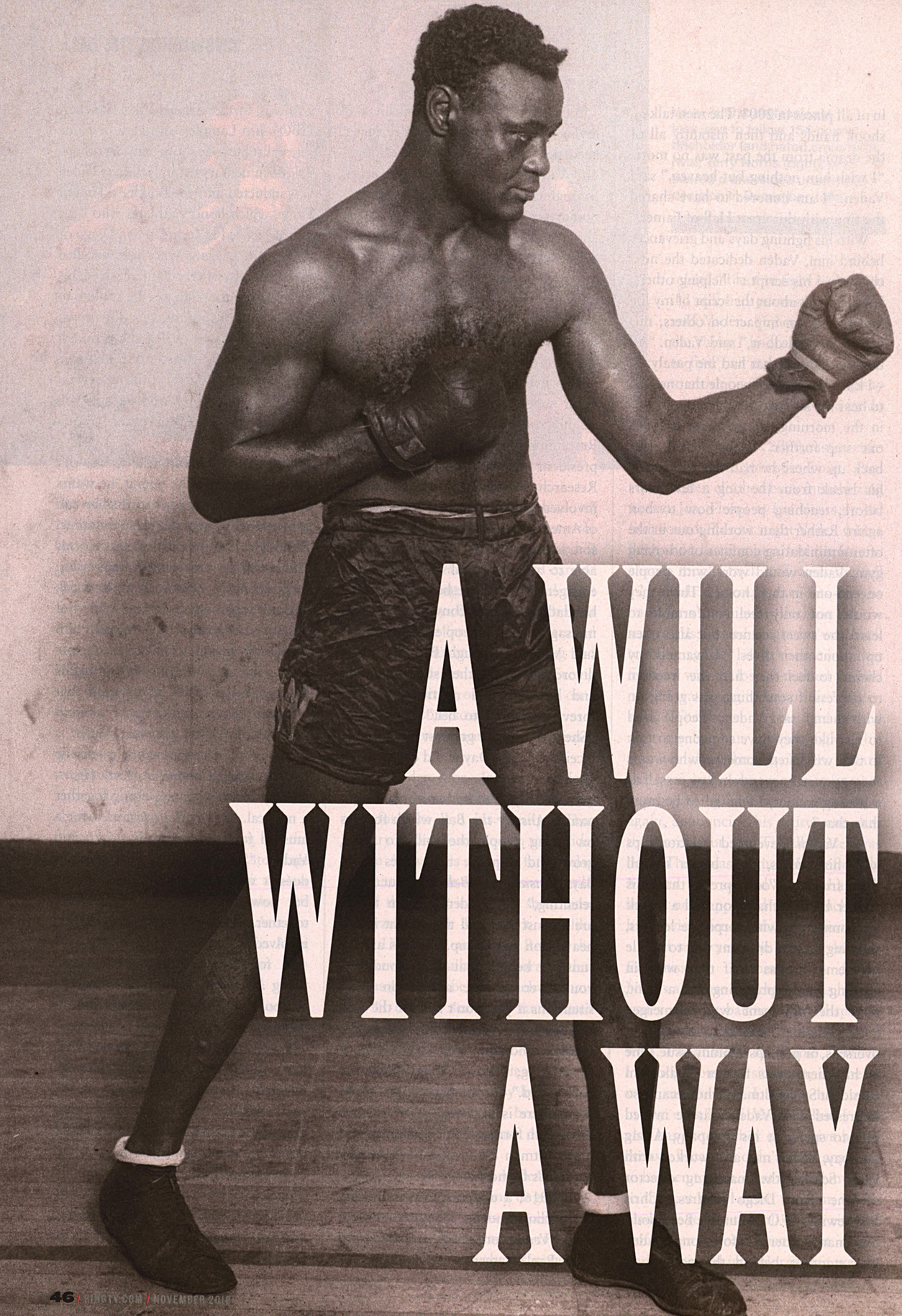
The former champ still works out every morning. As he puts it, he wants to remain "fight ready" so that he can be prepared to help people at any time. Although he always returns to his safe haven to remain in championship form, he never stops looking forward. "I don't forget where I come from, but I don't stay stuck," said Vaden. "I'm constantly trying to evolve, cultivate and create awe-inspiring things in this life. I have so much in my head that I want to do, so much that I want to achieve still." Later this year, Vaden is releasing a book of romantic poetry he wrote, named *Condition of my Heart*. He is even working on putting together a musical. "I've had a great idea for a musical for over a decade now," said Vaden. "Sometimes in life the script doesn't quite line up with the music, but now things are starting to come together. The right people are getting involved."

A former world champion boxer doing a musical? That's rare. Penning a book of romantic poetry? That's definitely a first.

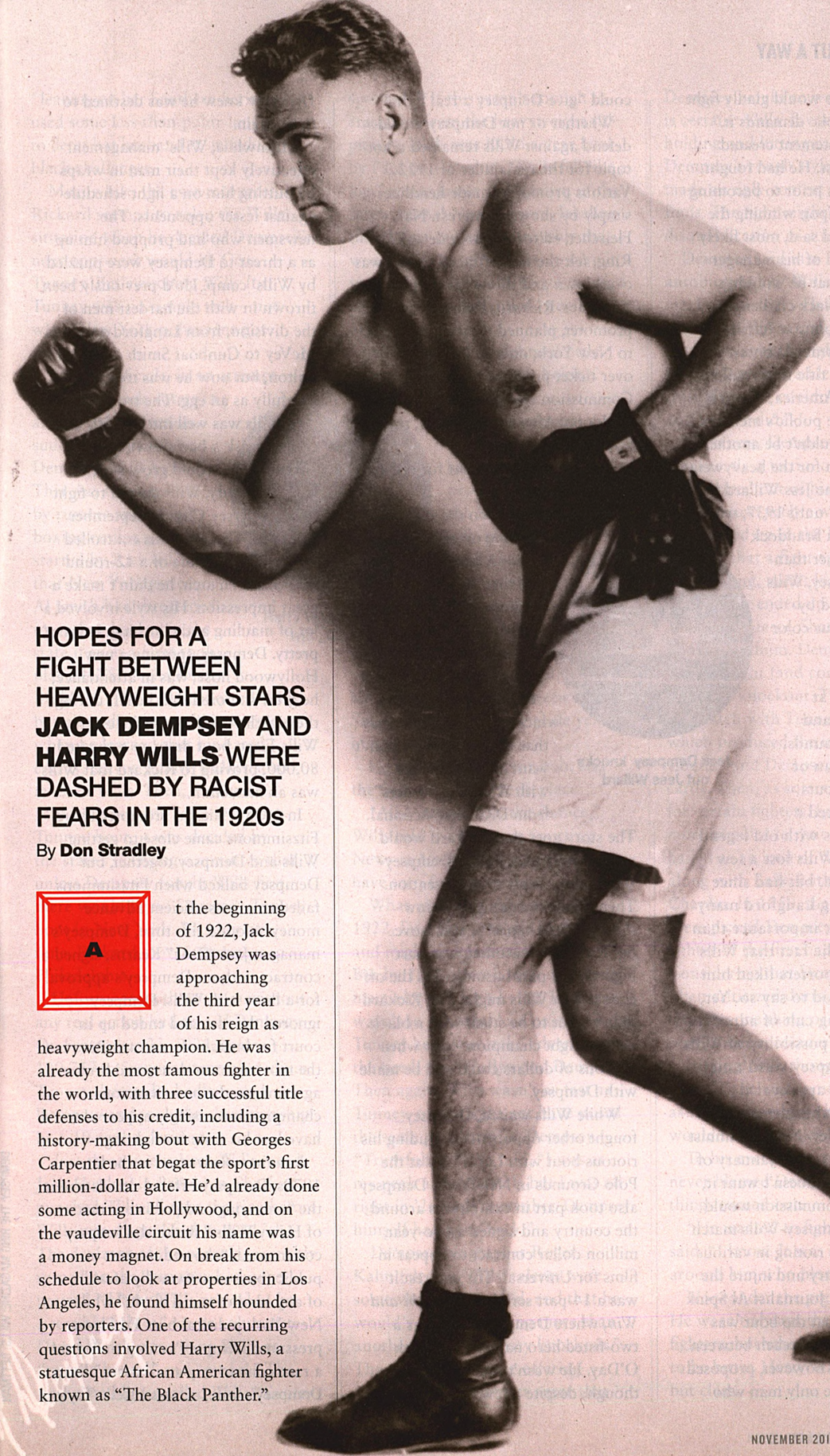
Spend more than five minutes with Paul Vaden and you'll find yourself infected by his positive energy. At 50 years old, he moves and talks faster than most people half his age. Clearly, there is still plenty more to The Ultimate's script.

Michael Montero can be found on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram @MonteroOnBoxing.

A WILL WITHOUT A WAY



WILLS: BETTMAN; DEMPSEY: THE RING MAGAZINE



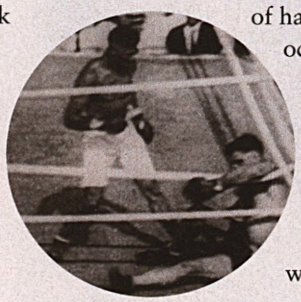
HOPES FOR A FIGHT BETWEEN HEAVYWEIGHT STARS JACK DEMPSEY AND HARRY WILLS WERE DASHED BY RACIST FEARS IN THE 1920s

By **Don Stradley**

At the beginning of 1922, Jack Dempsey was approaching the third year of his reign as heavyweight champion. He was already the most famous fighter in the world, with three successful title defenses to his credit, including a history-making bout with Georges Carpentier that begat the sport's first million-dollar gate. He'd already done some acting in Hollywood, and on the vaudeville circuit his name was a money magnet. On break from his schedule to look at properties in Los Angeles, he found himself hounded by reporters. One of the recurring questions involved Harry Wills, a statuesque African American fighter known as "The Black Panther."

Dempsey said he would gladly fight Wills "if the public demands it."

Dempsey's statement created ripples of interest. He had fought black opponents prior to becoming champion, but upon winning the title in 1919 he'd said, most likely at the suggestion of his manager and promoter, that he wouldn't defend against black challengers. The notorious Johnson-Jeffries bout of 1910, an interracial contest for the heavyweight title that resulted in riots around America, was still resonating in the public's memory. In fact, there wouldn't be another interracial match for the heavyweight title from the time Jess Willard beat Johnson in 1915 until 1937, when Joe Louis fought Jim Braddock in Chicago. Rather than challenge Dempsey, Wills would be blocked by boxing's notorious color barrier.



Jack Dempsey knocks out Jess Willard

Wills was an imposing figure at nearly 6-foot-3 and weighing 220 pounds, and was a veteran of more than 80 bouts. He'd even endured a multi-fight series with old legend Sam Langford. Wills lost a few of those early on, but had since beaten the fading Langford many times. Of greater importance than his record was the fact that Wills was amiable; reporters liked him and weren't afraid to say so. Yet, despite a growing cult of admirers in the press, the possibility of Wills challenging Dempsey wasn't met with unanimous approval.

"There is no public demand for such a match," New York columnist Robert Edgren wrote in January of 1922. "The public doesn't want it, and no boxing commission would sanction it. A Dempsey-Wills match would cause race rioting in various parts of the country and injure the sport of boxing." Journalist Al Spink agreed, writing that the bout was likely to "widen the breach between the races." Spink, however, proposed that Wills was the only man who could "give Dempsey a real fight."

Whether or not Dempsey would defend against Wills remained a hot topic for the remainder of 1922. Various promoters made headlines simply by showing interest. Nat Fleischer, editor and founder of The Ring, felt the fear of racial unrest was overblown and threw his support to Wills. Tex Rickard, Dempsey's usual promoter, planned to bring the fight to New York, only to be hassled over ticket prices by State Athletic Commission chairman William Muldoon. After much debate, the bout fell through.

And that's how it went for the next few years.

The fight seemed on the verge of happening on two other occasions, first in Montreal and then in Jersey City. Strangely, the bout was canceled each time due to, as Rickard claimed, orders from government officials. The suspicion, which grew over time, was that Rickard simply didn't want anything to do with Wills; the "orders" from D.C. were fictional. The story goes that Rickard would occasionally announce a Dempsey-Wills bout simply to get attention. Then, never intending to follow through, he'd cancel it and move on. Rickard's reasoning was part bigotry and part business: On the off chance that Wills might win, Rickard didn't want to be stuck with a black heavyweight champion – not when millions of dollars could still be made with Dempsey.

While Wills waited, Dempsey fought other opponents, including his riotous bout with Luis Firpo at the Polo Grounds in New York. Dempsey also took part in exhibitions around the country and signed a two-year, million dollar contract to appear in films for Universal. The end result was a 14-part serial called *Fight and Win*, where Dempsey starred as a two-fisted hero named Tiger Jack O'Day. He wasn't much of an actor, though; despite a few other roles, Dempsey knew he was destined to fight again.

Meanwhile, Wills' management effectively kept their man in wraps by putting him on a light schedule against lesser opponents. The newsmen who had propped him up as a threat to Dempsey were puzzled by Wills' camp. He'd previously been thrown in with the hardest men of the division, from Langford and Sam McVey to Gunboat Smith and Fred Fulton, but now he was treated as carefully as an egg. The truth was that Wills was well into his 30s and couldn't risk a bad showing.

Fearing he would grow stale from inactivity, Wills agreed to fight Firpo in Jersey City on September 11, 1924. Though Wills controlled nearly every minute of a 12-round no-decision match, he didn't make a great impression. His style involved a lot of mauling and clinching. It wasn't pretty. Dempsey, sporting a new Hollywood nose, was in attendance; he grew so bored that he left during the eighth round. Nevertheless, the Wills-Firpo bout drew an estimated 80,000, proving to Rickard that Wills was an attraction.

In 1925, Chicago promoter Floyd Fitzsimmons came close to getting Wills and Dempsey together, but Dempsey balked when Fitzsimmons failed to raise sufficient advance money. Around this time, Dempsey's manager, Jack "Doc" Kearns, signed a contract without Dempsey's approval for a bout with Wills. Dempsey ignored the idea and ended up in court for breach of contract. Between the movies, court dates, and broken agreements, the once-ferocious champion increasingly appeared to have lost his taste for fighting.

In a memoir written in the late 1970s, Dempsey offered details about the "annoying and persistent matter of Harry Wills." Rickard, Dempsey commented, "showed interest in public (but) was inwardly afraid of any kind of racial clash," while New York political boss Ed Flynn pressured Dempsey's camp to "avoid a race controversy at all costs." Even Dempsey's wife, actress Estelle Taylor,

"leaning on her Southern heritage," used some less-than-polite language to deter her husband from fighting a black challenger.

Meanwhile, the ever-resourceful Rickard seemed to solve the Wills situation when he decided Dempsey's next opponent would be Gene Tunney. But switching Wills for Tunney was no simple task – not when New York politicians got involved.

Albany officials, in an attempt to seduce black voters in an upcoming election, suddenly demanded a Dempsey-Wills bout. This was followed by rumors spread in boxing circles, possibly started by Rickard, that New York governor Al Smith had threatened to outlaw boxing in the state if such a fight took place. NYSAC chairman Muldoon publically endorsed Wills, but allegedly changed his position when he learned that his hated enemy, mayor Jimmy Walker, also favored Wills. Then, even with Muldoon pushing for a Dempsey-Tunney bout, it was decided by the state's licensing committee that unless Dempsey fought Wills first, there would be no Dempsey-Tunney bout in New York. Wasting no time, Rickard moved the event to Philadelphia.

Harry Wills with his wife, Sarah

Unfortunately, three years without any real action had ruined Dempsey. On September 23, 1926, before 120,757 in Sesquicentennial Stadium, Tunney defeated a badly rusted Dempsey and took the championship by a 10-round decision.

Just three weeks later, Wills faced Jack Sharkey in Brooklyn. Sharkey punched Wills all over the ring before Wills was disqualified in the 13th. The denizens of the press box quickly turned on the man they had once praised. "Harry Wills proved to be a terrible fighter," wrote columnist David Walsh, describing Wills as "muscle bound" and "pitiful." The Associated Press called Wills "a sorry spectacle." If this wasn't enough to erase him from the heavyweight title picture, Wills was KO'd a year later by Paolino Uzcudun. "Wills fell like a log," wrote James L. Kilgallen of the International News Service, labeling the contest as "unquestionably the worst heavyweight fight seen here in years." Nearing 40, Wills was headed for what Kilgallen called "pugilistic oblivion."

After a few more fights of little consequence, Wills left boxing. Using his old charm, he thrived in retirement to become a successful businessman and property owner. Despite the bad reviews of his later bouts, he remained friendly with the press. He'd grant interviews, telling amusing stories of his early days in New Orleans, his liquid diets and how his career had been guided by his wife, a gun-toting sweetie named Sarah who would sit ringside yelling instructions to her man.

He talked of Dempsey, too, and the fight that never took place.

"All I wanted was the chance," Wills told the St. Louis Sporting News in 1948. "Then they could have seen for themselves."

What would've happened? In 1922, Dempsey was still in top form and might've knocked Wills out. But by 1926, after a long stretch of inactivity and high living, Dempsey wasn't so formidable. Could Wills, as Tunney had done, take advantage of the tired, post-Hollywood Dempsey? Then again, Wills wasn't as fast as Tunney, so he might not have posed the same problems for Dempsey. "Truthfully," Wills said, "I was at my peak around 1921, but I was all right in '26 and, remember, Dempsey himself had gone back."

Dempsey biographer Roger Kahn felt that Wills' talents were somewhat exaggerated, and that he would've been "nothing more than another quick Dempsey knockout." The majority of those offering opinions on the subject agree that Dempsey would've won. One thing is certain: Wills' favored tactic of holding and hitting coupled with Dempsey's rough style would've made an ugly contest with plenty of fouls. The fight might've ended in a disqualification or a no-contest.

Dempsey said in a 1959 autobiography, "Wills was made for me. I could always lick those big, slow guys. I personally never ducked him. I thought the fight should take place." Dempsey added that men he trusted "said I couldn't fight Wills, and I never did."

Elsewhere, Dempsey wrote, "Wills was mostly a victim of bigotry. He was gypped out of his crack at the title because people with a lot of money tied up in the boxing game thought that a fight against me, if it went wrong, might kill the business."

Dempsey ended up fighting Wills' conqueror, Sharkey, in Yankee Stadium. Dempsey won a hardfought (and controversial) battle by knockout. This earned him a rematch with Tunney in Chicago, which produced the infamous "Long Count," and Dempsey lost on the cards. Then, as sometimes happens for certain fighters, he grew even more popular in retirement. He was hailed as an icon of the 1920s, right along with Babe Ruth and Charles Chaplin. In 1950, the Associated Press picked Dempsey as the greatest fighter of the first half of the century. Considering that Dempsey was often criticized during his fighting days for one thing or another, the post-career accolades must've been gratifying. Still, though it wasn't his fault, he was sometimes recalled as the heavyweight champion who wouldn't – or couldn't – fight Wills.

To his everlasting credit, Wills never blamed Dempsey for the way things turned out.

"He wanted to fight me," Wills said. "I know. It was just the people around him who blocked it."

No wonder the press liked him. He wasn't always the cleanest of fighters, but when he had every right to be bitter, Harry Wills was nothing but class.

In long-distance running, Marlen Esparza finds solace from the stresses of life and professional boxing.

THE ROAD AHEAD

MARLEN ESPARZA WILL GET BACK TO PURSUING A WORLD TITLE SOON ENOUGH, BUT FOR NOW SHE HAS 26.2 OTHER REASONS TO STAY FOCUSED

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Only a prizefighter can look at running 26.2 miles as something fun. But when Marlen Esparza toes the line with more than 50,000 other runners for the New York City Marathon on November 4, it will be more than a test of will and stamina. It will be a few hours that are hers and hers alone.

"I grew up in a not-so-great place," said the 2012 U.S. Olympic bronze medalist and current flyweight prospect. "Financially, it was hard growing up, and there was a lot going on. All my friends growing up were in jail or God knows where, and running helped me when I was younger.

"Boxing is always an escape from a lot of things, but I get judged for performances and judged for sparring, and it gets a little bit more difficult to relax," Esparza continues. "With running, it's the opposite. It doesn't matter how fast I'm going and no one's really expecting me to do anything a certain way. It's a lot of stress relief and a lot of time to myself when I can zone out a hundred percent. I would definitely say that's what I get from running."

A cross country runner in high school, Esparza competed in several half-marathons and 15Ks over the years, but earlier this year, the Women's Sports Foundation contacted her about running in the NYC Marathon for their team. She was all-in.

"I've never run a full marathon for competition before, so it's gonna be fun," she said. "It's new; it's different."

But fun?

"The competition and the idea of doing something new is fun," she laughs. "I'm sure it will hurt a lot."

Yet with that hurt comes freedom and a momentary escape from a year that has had its share of challenges, and just like when she was growing up, running has shown up right when she needed it.

★★★★

Even with a bronze medal, Esparza was the golden girl of women's boxing after the 2012 Games, complete with endorsement deals with the likes of Nike and Cover Girl. She missed out on the Rio Olympics, but expectations were still high for her pro prospects. She signed with Golden Boy Promotions, and in 2017 she didn't lose a round in winning her first four bouts.

The same was expected for 2018, but then tragedy struck on January 7 when Esparza's brother Diego Esparza-Arcienega, a beloved musician in Houston, was killed in a car accident.

He was only 31 years old. Crushed by this loss, Esparza looked to boxing for an escape; she kept her April date with Laetizia Campana and scored her first pro knockout.

"It was my way of trying to deal with things," said Esparza, who also saw a high-profile relationship with British Olympian Nicola Adams hit the skids. She would find love again, marrying Frank Figueroa in June, and a move from California back to Texas completed what has been a life-altering 2018 for the 29-year-old.

"I reset," she said. "I moved from California back to Texas, got married, dealt with family stuff and was still working. There was a lot going on and it was like, 'Alright, let me relocate, get myself together and rest.' It was probably the biggest reset I've done so far in my life, and it was definitely needed. Now I'm back on track, I would say a little bit more level-headed in knowing what I'm doing, where I'm going and what the goal is."

★★★★

Esparza's goal remains world domination in what Hugh McIlvanney described as "The Hardest Game," but she's not going to rush anything. Four fights in 2017 was a nice start, yet at press time nothing was scheduled to get her in the ring before the marathon.

"I'm pretty sure I'll fight before then, but nothing's set for sure yet," Esparza said. "It's still the first year, so everything's kind of caught up to me."

It has been a whirlwind for her under the public eye for a while now, and in dominating all her bouts, Esparza has yet to face that opponent to test her. Such criticism has reached her ears, but she takes it as the cost of learning the pro game on the fly.

"I was kind of getting used to the pro game, to the transition, to a lot of things," she admits. "I found my ground now and I know what I'm doing, so I only expect to get a lot better and show a lot more than people have seen thus far. We're gonna keep moving up and I'm gonna get ready for those challenges, and I hope that I'll continue to surpass my opponents like I feel like I can."

A candid admission like that is rare in this sport, and it bodes well for Esparza's future in a division filled with world-class operators like Ibeth Zamora Silva, Arely Mucino and Melissa McMorrow. And then there's always her Golden Boy stablemate Seniesa Estrada, who appears to be on a collision course with Esparza for a fight that should light up Los Angeles, should it take place there. It's all good stuff for Esparza, who believes she should be ready for those big fights in the next year.

"I think I'll leave a lot of it up to Golden Boy as far as what we fight for first, but I definitely see fighting for the titles within the next year," she said. "I think the whole idea, at least for me, to fight lesser opponents was to get the idea of being serious and get a sense of self, more than anything. And then after that, whoever is there and whoever needs to be beat, regardless of their pro experience, it doesn't matter. Because with my experience, once I know what I'm doing, it's done. So in the next year, it's definitely time."

But first, there's a 26.2-mile fight to deal with, and while most runners will put in a 16-week training cycle to prepare, Esparza has been going even longer in order to mix her running in with her boxing without burning out.

"I've been running for almost two months now – maybe even more than that – to get ready for the marathon," Esparza said 14 weeks out from the starting cannon on Staten Island. "It takes a little bit of effort as far as juggling to not overdo it, because sometimes you have to hit 13- or 14-mile runs and it's starting to get higher and higher. So with that, I had to take a little bit more off-time. So I do a little bit of cycling and some boxing, and when I go to the boxing gym, it's a lot more technique because I can't put so much on my body right now. It's not as easy. And I'm not 17 years old anymore. (laughs) So it makes a big difference on my joints. I'm running, and you think it wouldn't affect my shoulders and things of that nature, but it does. So it's more of investing time into recovery and making sure that I feel good and I'm not going overboard, and to listen to my body."

Esparza takes the fight to game-but-outclassed Samantha Salazar, whom she outpointed over four rounds on the Canelo Alvarez-Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. undercard.

AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

"ONCE I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING, IT'S DONE."

★★★★

The scariest part of running, as in boxing, is the reality that there will be pain – both mental and physical – for as long as you're on the course or in the ring. There's no way around it, and it takes a special athlete to endure that suffering. Marlen Esparza has been to the top of the amateur boxing world and now she's set her sights on the same heights as a pro. In November, she tackles the world's biggest marathon. She can visualize the starting line. Everything from there is a mystery. And she's fine with that.

"I know it's a lot different than anything I've done, because halfway through, I'm usually done with the races that I've done," Esparza said. "I have to mentally prepare for it, and I know it's gonna hurt a lot. I'm gonna deal with new pains that I've never experienced before, and that's a little bit scary, because how am I gonna react when I'm feeling something I've never felt or been pushed somewhere I've never been pushed? I'm trying to visualize that … visualize the unknown. It's scary, but I'm gonna just have to keep going, no matter what. One foot in front of the other." RING

FIGHT ROUNDUP

A bloodied but fired-up Eleider Alvarez stands on the verge of an upset victory after knocking Sergey Kovalev down in the seventh round.

MATTHEW HEASLEY/

BY **BRIAN HARTY**

RECENT ACTION AND FUTURE SIGNIFICANCE

ELEIDER ALVAREZ KO 7
SERGEY KOVALEV

Aug. 4, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Atlantic City

Sergey Kovalev used to be "Krusher" Kovalev, the Keyser Soze of boxing, conjuring a "we do not speak of it" mix of respect, sympathy, terror and titillation in casual fans who couldn't pick him out of a lineup. It was enough to believe, even fixate on the idea that the knockout artist's fists weren't just heavy, but lethal – a perception based on the tragedy of Roman Simakov, who died after Kovalev knocked him out in 2011. For whatever harm or macabre benefit that lends to a boxer's appeal, it's the reputation that haunted Kovalev going into his breakout win over former light heavyweight champion Bernard Hopkins in 2014.

Then came a pair of humbling losses to Andre Ward, and Kovalev's mystique as "the most feared man in boxing" crumbled. The racist stuff – comments aired on social media and at press conferences involving Ward, reclusive lineal champion Adonis Stevenson and Kovalev's now-former trainer, John David Jackson – didn't help.

Who was the Kovalev who entered the Hard Rock on August 4 to face Eleider Alvarez? He'd promised that switching to a Russian-speaking trainer (Abror Tursunpulatov) after his nasty breakup with Jackson would herald the rebirth of his Krusher ways, but repeated it so often that he sounded like a man trying to

Dmitry Bivol launches an overhand right at awkwardly elusive veteran Isaac Chilemba, who managed to last the 12-round distance.

convince himself more than anyone. He seemed to be grasping for an identity, targeting the cameras around him with awkward smiles to build a brand fans could once again embrace. The script called for the third knockout of his post-Ward comeback and second defense of his WBO title against the Colombian, who, though seemingly a light puncher (23-0, but with only 11 knockouts at the time) and fighting outside of his adopted homeland of Canada for the first time, was a skilled, legitimate contender. We would soon re-believe the hype.

With all that happening in one corner, the only frightening person in the ring at that point was Alvarez. That stare. Think "the thing that happens when you combine the sun, a magnifying glass and a dry leaf." Once the fight started, Alvarez carried that intensity in a way that didn't seem so beneficial at first. He was wound very tightly, quick but bordering on jumpy, while a relaxed Kovalev moseyed around and absorbed jabs with the patience of a predator further up the food chain. Those jabs were very sharp and very accurate, though, and Alvarez had a knack for timing them just as the signal to punch was halfway between Kovalev's brain and his arm. He was also following the jabs with hard right hands and mixing in some body shots, and overall was doing well enough to win some early rounds. But there was no sense of alarm from Kovalev's corner. Despite adding "boxing" to his list of talents after the Hopkins fight, "bludgeoning" was still at the top.

The end almost came in Round 4 when a skirmish broke out and Alvarez was wobbled by Kovalev's punches. Back in his corner, those death-ray eyes were wandering for the first time. The challenger came out strong in the fifth to prove he was still in it, but Kovalev was now ramping up the power, intensifying his attack, and his swagger was getting more pronounced as he took control. All the signs pointed to a steadily increasing beatdown that would see Alvarez counted out before the championship rounds.

But in Round 7, "improbable" separated itself from "impossible." Alvarez skipped a straight right off Kovalev's shoulder and caught every square inch of his temple, which staggered the Russian and dropped him on his ass. It was the kind of punch you don't recover from, and when Kovalev stood up it was easy to see that he was a million miles away. Knockdown number two was a brutal left hook-right combo, after which Kovalev bravely rose again, but a right hook behind the ear was enough for a third collapse. Referee David Fields immediately dropped to a knee and waved the fight off with 15 seconds remaining in the round.

Alvarez was overcome with emotion following the win – a current frontrunner for Upset of the Year – and now finds himself atop a division that includes WBA titleholder Dmitry Bivol, who pitched a near-shutout against Isaac Chilemba on the undercard. For Kovalev, there is a rematch

clause available. He was extremely disappointed after the loss, and the harm it did to his career is undeniable, but maybe his identity isn't to be found in being the camera-friendly HBO star. Maybe in some weird way he's relieved.

DMITRY BIVOL UD 12 ISAAC CHILEMBA

Aug. 4, Hard Rock Hotel & Casino, Atlantic City

Bivol won this fight, no question, but it wasn't his performance that stood out. He's already 27 with relatively meager pro experience (14-0, 11 KOs), but the former amateur star has talent to burn and is seen as the next big thing in the 175-pound division (at least he was until Alvarez met Kovalev later that night), so the only question was "how" he would beat the 31-year-old Isaac Chilemba, who was on the downslide with three losses in his four previous fights.

Bivol didn't disappoint at first. He wasn't that interested in jabbing and he wasn't about to give Old Man Chilemba a feel-out round, choosing instead to unpack his entire arsenal immediately – and it was an impressive stash. His combinations didn't look like rehearsed routines, but rather creations built unpredictably on the fly from a very rich palette of punches, all of them damaging. The reflexes and timing he used to launch those combos – from counters, leads … didn't matter – were exquisite, and his defense was as much about being elusive – he can jump out of range, slip sideways, catch – as it was about creating doubt and hesitation with the threat of his power. He's a complete fighter, and it's difficult to imagine how Chilemba, who looked completely overwhelmed after three rounds, could find anything louder than "You're going to lose" in his mind.

That's really where the beauty of this fight happened. Not only did Chilemba go the distance, he was actually winning rounds by the end of the fight. Perhaps it took a Russian in his corner to understand the Russian across the ring. A bit of explanation for that completely misleading but sort of based in reality observation: Bivol is from Kyrgyzstan but considers himself Russian, and Chilemba's trainer, Roy Jones Jr. … who knows what he considers himself? But he's had dual Russian citizenship since 2015.

Somehow, Jones had the right words and Chilemba had the mental strength to keep getting up, and it clearly unnerved Bivol. As the man from Malawi hung in there and gradually began to land more punches of his own, it was the defending titleholder who became hesitant, and from the brilliance of the first three rounds the fight devolved into a completely ordinary performance. Boring even.

A subdued Mikey Garcia has his hands raised in victory after outpointing Robert Easter Jr. to unify the WBC and IBF lightweight titles.

JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA

As a fight, it got worse and worse, and neither fighter looked pleased when it was over, even before the results were announced (120-108, 116-112, 120-108 for Bivol). But it was the kind of bad experience where you could hate watching it and also appreciate how long you had to suffer. Chilemba found the strength in his mind to banish doubt (aka reality) and go the distance. And Bivol's status took a hit, for sure. He's still amazing, but the inexperience showed.

MIKEY GARCIA UD 12 ROBERT EASTER JR.

July 28, Staples Center, Los Angeles

Robert Easter walked into the Staples Center with his IBF lightweight title to a less-than-warm welcome, but that was to be expected; he was a long way from home. But the then-undefeated Ohioan smiled off the boos and got to work immediately, staying very active in the first couple of rounds while Mikey Garcia scoped him out and didn't stray too far beyond his spring-loaded jab.

In the third round, Garcia stunned Easter with a straight right, then followed with a left hook that launched him like a stuntman with a wire attached to his back. Easter got back on his feet with little harm done, but the knockdown was his signal that Garcia's scoping-out period had ended. From that point forward, Easter's output dropped precipitously as Garcia's intensity did the opposite, and by the seventh round, Easter's father/trainer was telling his son in the corner that he needed to let his hands go if he wanted to win. He got what he wanted in the ninth when a toe-to-toe war broke out, but it was the wrong sort of fight for Easter, who at nearly 6 feet tall (to Garcia's 5-foot-6) has the gangly limbs to excel from the outside but the tendency – reminiscent of Paul Williams – to jump into the pocket where those advantages disappear.

Garcia was surely thankful for not having to reach anymore. But even when Easter did fall back in an attempt to box from a distance with no hope of winning on the cards, Garcia continued to press forward as if searching for a knockout.

"I'm better than ever. I'm in my prime," said Garcia (39-0, 30 KOs) after sweeping the scorecards (118-109, 117-110, 116-111). With titles in four divisions and now freely moving between 135 and 140, he's looking further up the scale where "Mikey fever" has spread to every name at welterweight, specifically formidable IBF beltholder Errol Spence Jr., and even as high as Canelo Alvarez.

TEVIN FARMER UD 12 BILLY DIB

Aug. 3, Australian Technology Park, Eveleigh, Australia

Tevin Farmer had every right to be pissed off going into this fight. Last December, the IBF 130-pound title had slipped through his fingers after some ridiculous judging awarded it to Kenichi Ogawa, only for the belt to be orphaned when Ogawa tested positive for steroids. Farmer also had every right to be pissed off after nine rounds of grappling with Billy Dib, except this time he was allowed to express himself by hitting somebody.

Tevin Farmer traveled to Billy Dib's home country of Australia to at last claim the IBF 130-pound title.

Jesus Rojas (left) displayed freakish durability by absorbing Joseph Diaz's Jr.'s blazing combinations for 12 competitive rounds.

Which he did, hitting Dib with a left hook that floored the former featherweight titleholder and provided a welcome 10 seconds of relief from an otherwise ugly display of clubbing and grinding.

Farmer has boxing skills and speed, both of which he used to work Dib over in every which way when he wasn't being mauled. Now he also has that IBF belt – finally – after the judges delivered scores of 118-109, 119-108 and 120-107 (and remember, this took place in a suburb of Sydney, Dib's hometown). If only he had more punching power. It might be a problem against a young cannon like WBA titleholder Gervonta Davis, who is the potential opponent most often brought up. But the 28-year-old Farmer (26-4-1, 5 KOs) made it clear that he doesn't care who it is, just stop talking about it and sign the check. He has been waiting long enough.

Dib (43-5, 24 KOs) announced his retirement following the loss.

JOSEPH DIAZ JR. UD 12 JESUS ROJAS

Aug. 11, The Avalon, Los Angeles

JoJo Diaz missed weight, so the chance to win Rojas' WBA "regular" featherweight belt (the recognized WBA title belongs to Leo Santa Cruz) was not an option, but it may be that he has outgrown 126 anyway. We'll see. The more important question is whether some lab can start mass producing whatever Rojas' body is composed of, because we could be making space elevators and X-Men out of it. It's not like Diaz has godlike punching power, but he was putting together combinations of five or six uppercuts and multi-level hooks that reasonably could've floored a lot of fighters, and they had absolutely zero visible effect. Rojas would just raise his hands for a bit of gratuitous defense, then put his head down and get back to punching. And he was able to do a lot of it, exceeding Diaz's overall output, because Diaz only fought in bursts – which were accurate and eye-catching – while Rojas threw a constant stream of thudding blows.

It was a good, high-volume contest with lots of entertaining exchanges; the fighters' styles matched up well. The problem was that Rojas (26-2-2, 19 KOs) reportedly hasn't even been knocked down in 12 years and Diaz's lack of the aforementioned Thor-level power wasn't going to change that, so the fight was pretty one-note. The scores rightfully came out in favor of Diaz (27-1, 14 KOs), who should be commended for taking on a tank like Rojas in his first fight since losing to Gary Russell Jr. in May, but were edging toward stinky with the spreads (115-113, 116-112 and 117-111).

It should be also mentioned that this was the inaugural edition of the "Golden Boy Fight Night" series that aims to blaze a trail into fans' hands by streaming on Facebook Watch, and Oscar De La Hoya was ringside in Hollywood's historic Avalon theater with Sugar Ray Leonard to mark the occasion. Whenever a new platform brings a new brand and new faces to the mix, it's always interesting to see what the ring announcer's Buffer-esque catchphrase will be (although where the streaming was concerned, the less said about "buffering" the better). So, for your contemplation, here's what Jeremiah Gallegos busted out with: "It's Golden Time!"

WORLD BEAT

Former Ring heavyweight champ Tyson Fury is a happy man now that the path is clear for a high-profile showdown against WBC titleholder Deontay Wilder in late 2018.

U.K.

BY GARETH A DAVIES

TYSON FURY IS UP FOR THE 'DEONTAY WILDER CHALLENGE'

It came out of the blue, and "Gypsy King" Tyson Fury was not holding back. The search for a signed contract in the back-and-forth between the teams of Anthony Joshua and Deontay Wilder – to seal the deal for a contest with all four corners of the heavyweight crown at stake – had stalled. Up stepped Fury, after 30 months away from the sport with a catalog of issues since defeating Wladimir Klitschko and one facile comeback fight under his belt, to accept the Wilder challenge.

Fury and Wilder spoke, or rather texted, apparently privately, and the fight was reportedly "very close" to being signed for late 2018. Fury used the moment to denigrate Joshua and Eddie Hearn, raising his own profile once more. He insisted that he was rescuing the division from its slough.

Speaking before his fight with Francesco Pianeta in Belfast (August 18), Fury told me: "Whether I'm ready or not, I'm doing this (fight with Wilder) for British boxing, to take the shame away from it. Because we've got one idiot there who is chiseled out of stone who is afraid of his own shadow. He wouldn't take the fight with Wilder and made British boxing a laughing stock." [Editor's note: Fury was successful against Pianeta, winning every round, and it was reported that the fight with Wilder is indeed official.]

Fury is adamant that Joshua should have taken the Wilder fight immediately."Regardless of win, lose or draw, if he's a fighting man, he should have taken the fight. He didn't, so I have to step in and fill the boots, because that's what I do. I'm not afraid to fight any man in any backyard. I showed that in Germany, Canada, Ireland ... everywhere I've ever been, I've had to go over and beat their champions. And that's what I do best. I beat their bums. At the end of the day, they're all bums anyway. Bum city."

Historically, some of the great heavyweights did take time to regain the title after time away, enforced by bans and, like Fury, self-exile. Like Muhammad Ali and George Foreman. "Ali had three years out of the ring, came back and fought Jerry Quarry and then Oscar Bonavena," said Fury. "Then he lost to Frazier and he didn't fight Frazier again for another 14 fights. Maybe it was too soon for him, maybe he did need the 14 fights. But even when he had the fights, it wasn't a foregone conclusion. It was a nip-and-tuck fight (between him and Frazier). Really, did he need all them fights? I'm not sure. Foreman came back and had 20-odd fights before he fought Holyfield in his comeback. He needed a lot of fights because the man was nearly 50. [Editor's note: Foreman, who was 42 when he fought Evander Holyfield in 1991,

CHARLES MCQUILLAN

had come back from a 10-year retirement and fought 24 times prior to challenging the undisputed champ.]

"His style was coming forward and blasting bombs, so he needed those fights to get the cobwebs off. I'm not 50 or 40 – I'm 29."

Fury sees himself as different: "I lost a couple of prime years – from 27 to 30 are prime years. I lost them, so I'm not looking back and crying about them. I'm looking at the 30 to 35. They're my prime years. I've not been in many wars; I'm still quite fresh. I've got quite a few years left in me."

★★★

As chess matches go, the heavyweight division is pretty intriguing at present, and both Dillian Whyte and Dereck Chisora put themselves in the shop window during a thrilling night at London's O2 Arena on July 28.

Promoter Eddie Hearn is jockeying for his star performer, Joshua, to face Wilder in a battle for the undisputed heavyweight crown on April 14, 2019, at Wembley Stadium. That may change depending on results in September (Joshua-Alexander Povetkin, September 22) and potentially November or December (Wilder-Fury). But Whyte, who scored a unanimous decision against former titleholder Joseph Parker, and the rejuvenated Chisora, who knocked out former title challenger Carlos Takam with two booming right hands in the eighth round after he had played rope-a-dope for seven (training videos posted after the contest showed that it was a clear game plan put together by trainer Don Charles), have created the kind of chess game that Hearn has been waiting for.

If Wilder does not fight Joshua in April – Wembley Stadium is already booked – Whyte is likely to be installed as the favorite to fight Joshua again (if, of course, the 2012 Olympic champion comes through his next challenge). Hearn described the Joshua-Whyte rematch (the champion won by seventh-round stoppage in December 2015) as "inevitable" after Whyte's resilient, relentless performance in felling Parker for the first time in his career. Whyte actually had Parker down twice (the first from a clash of heads) and survived the scare of a knockdown himself in the final round as Parker went for broke. Thirty seconds longer and the fight may well have gone to the Samoan. Whyte won a unanimous decision on the cards – 113-112, 115-110 114-111 – yet he could have been deducted a point for persistent dirty tactics. He was spoken to nine times by referee Ian John-Lewis during the bout.

"The last time, I tried to outbox Joshua. But this time I'd take the fight to him – lean on his chest, rough him up a bit – and look for the punches that I believe can hurt him," explained Whyte in the afterglow of victory, having related stories from his earlier life of when he drenched his leg in alcohol and removed a bullet with pliers, and when he sewed himself up, Rambo-style, after a knife attack. On both occasions, he did the work himself so as to avoid alarming his mother. But Whyte is clearly experiencing a "second life" and is growing, maturing and becoming an inspirational figure. The Parker fight saw his credibility grow. Whyte is still raw, but his desire and heart is of champion's material. He thinks most days of a return match with Joshua, whom he beat in the amateur ranks. "I know what punches he's vulnerable to. He's a champ, he's experienced; I got a win on a big show but he's more experienced than me. We need a fight in the meantime, because I'm still learning. There's still things I need to work on – I need to get a bit sharper, get my weight back down a little bit – but if Joshua wants it in April, he can have it."

There is also the prospect of a rematch with Chisora, who impressed with victory over Takam (who took Joshua 10 rounds in Cardiff last October). But Whyte was dismissive of the contest with Chisora, whom he beat in a brilliant 12-round brawl in Manchester in December 2016.

★★★

Tony Bellew could be facing cruiserweight champion Aleksandr Usyk by the end of the year if he drops back to 200 pounds after two high-profile victories over David Haye at heavyweight. Usyk is even being touted as a future opponent for Joshua, and Eddie Hearn has made the Ukrainian a multi-fight offer to compete in the U.K.

The first thing Usyk did after defeating Murat Gassiev in a masterful performance in the final of the World Boxing Super Series tournament was to call out Bellew, who was on honeymoon in Greece at the time with his wife, Rachel.

Bellew responded with alacrity, calling Hearn from abroad. "Tony was straight on the phone to me, saying that he wanted the fight," revealed Hearn. "Tony doesn't need the fight, but he does want it. He said if I'm going to put myself at risk and my body at significant risk, I want the money, but I want to have the chance of being the undisputed cruiserweight champion. Tony really is as game as they come."

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

FROM ONE OTT PLATFORM TO ANOTHER FOR PACQUIAO?

After showing he had at least one more knockout blow in his "national fists," Manny Pacquiao has at least two suitors for his future fights.

Bob Arum, who famously

promoted Pacquiao for many of his biggest fights before Pacman declared himself a free agent, and Top Rank president Todd DuBoef visited the fighting senator at his hometown in General Santos City on August 10. Nothing had been finalized by the time the pair left the country a few hours later by private plane, a source told The Philippine Star.

A few days prior, Eddie Hearn of Matchroom Boxing intimated at a press stop in Chicago that he had been in discussions to bring Pacquiao to his new DAZN platform, another "over the top" (OTT) subscription service similar to the Top Rank-linked ESPN+, which broadcast Pacquiao's win over Lucas Matthysse in July.

What Hearn can offer is a big budget – $1 billion over seven years, it was announced – plus high-profile foes Amir Khan and Kell Brook, both of whom, like Pacquiao, are on the back end of their careers. One speed bump is that Pacquiao wants to fight in places other than the United States, Hearn told the Sporting News, while he himself is focused primarily on expanding his British company into the U.S.

"He wants an awful lot of money, as you would expect Manny Pacquiao to want, and the right fights have to be there," said Hearn.

★★★

Most boxers dream of scoring big KOs. For Reymart Gaballo, putting his opponents to sleep had become so routine that he began hoping to hear the judges' scorecards. Early in his 18-fight career he'd won two unanimous decisions, but those were only four- and six-rounders.

Before his fight against Stephon Young in March, he told his promoter, Jim Claude Manangquil, that he wanted to go the distance. It had slipped Manangquil's mind until before Round 10 of the fight against Young. Leading with just three rounds left with an interim bantamweight belt on the line, Manangquil hyped up Gaballo by asking him about his dream. Instead of mentioning a belt, Gaballo said something unexpected: "I'm gonna do our dream. I'm gonna go 12 rounds."

Virtually no one outside the Seminole Hard Rock in Hollywood, Florida, saw that fight due to a lack of television coverage, but the hard-punching 21-year-old will get a national audience when he faces Tanzania's Julias Kasarawe (29-6-1, 15 KOs) at SM City North EDSA Skydome in Quezon City. The 10-round non-title fight will be aired live on ESPN 5. It's unlikely that Gaballo is headed for another decision here, as Kasarawe has been stopped three times, including in his last fight by Prince Patel in July. The fight is intended to introduce Gaballo to ESPN 5's massive sports audience before doing bigger business together down the road.

Also appearing on the card will be Marlon Tapales, the former WBO bantamweight titleholder who hasn't fought since losing his title on the scales just before stopping Shohei Omori in April of 2017. Tapales is still managed by Wakee Salud but has been training out of the Sanman Gym, getting in good sparring work with Gaballo. Tapales (30-2, 13 KOs) will face Goodluck Mrema (22-3, 12 KOs), a Tanzanian whose last trip to the Philippines ended in a 78-second KO loss to Jeo Santisima.

★★★

Another Sanman boxer, John Vincent Moralde, will have a chance to pull a second-straight upset in Fresno when he faces 2012 U.S. Olympian Jamel Herring on the Jose Ramirez-Antonio Orozco undercard on September 14. Moralde (20-1, 10 KOs) bounced back from his poor showing in a stoppage loss to Toka Kahn Clary with a unanimous decision over Ismail Muwendo last May, reviving his career. Against Herring, he'll have to show he's learned a lot about dealing with southpaws since his first defeat.

★★★

Jerwin Ancajas has an opponent for his sixth defense of the IBF junior bantamweight title, as he's set to face Alejandro Santiago (16-2-4, 7 KOs) on September 29 at a venue still to be determined. Santiago, of Tijuana, Mexico, has a style that should allow Ancajas more opportunities to shine offensively than he did in his last fight against Jonas Sultan. One would hope that this lower-profile showcase leads to bigger showdowns with Juan Francisco Estrada, Srisaket Sor Rungvisai or even a returning Roman Gonzalez in 2019.

★★★

Edward Heno continued his streak of defeating more experienced foes on August 11, outpointing Jesse Espinas to retain the OPBF junior flyweight belt. Espinas is rated in the top 15 of all four sanctioning bodies and has tricky southpaw movement which could have befuddled a relative upstart with little formal amateur experience.

Promoter Anson Tiu Co credits Heno's sparring work with boxers from the Bebot Elorde Jr. stable with helping him round out his hard-swinging approach into something more of a boxer-puncher style, and says he's looking to get Heno some opportunities abroad next.

"I was impressed how he was able to negate the speed and power of Espinas with his jabs and digs to the body," said Tiu Co. "Before it was only his uppercuts he was fond of throwing."

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

Strawweight Simphiwe "Chain Reaction" Khonco finally broke a year's worth of inactivity when he returned in his hometown of Umtata to face Filipino Toto Landero on July 22. Given the layoff, it was a tough assignment. Landero had gone the distance in a challenge of WBA titleholder Thammanoon Niyomtrong (aka Knockout CP Freshmart) in his last fight and also has a win over countryman Vic Saludar, who currently holds the WBO belt.

The fighters got off to a slow start, with Khonco landing a hard right hand-left hook combo but otherwise feeling each other out for the first three rounds. Things started heating up in the fourth round as Landero got aggressive, but Khonco countered his wild rushes well. Landero did manage to get a hard right in at the end of the round to keep Khonco from taking over.

Landero came alive in the fifth and had a good round. He landed another hard right in the sixth but Khonco retaliated with good work to the body and a hard uppercut.

The geography of the fight changed from the seventh to the ninth round as the South African took the fight to the inside. It was a strategy that worked, as he belabored Landero's body and snapped his head back with some eye-catching uppercuts.

Then, in the 10th, Khonco inexplicably abandoned his strategy and returned to boxing Landero from a distance. He had the superior jab, but Landero was landing his rights and the local man started breathing hard. A tiring Khonco kept working his jab and landed the occasional combination to the body in the last two rounds, but Landero kept retaliating with the harder shots to possibly shade those rounds.

In the end, it wasn't enough. Khonco had banked enough points to win a highly competitive but deserved decision by two scores of 116-112 and a rather too wide 117-112.

"It was tough, but that's good. It was the kind of fight I needed," Khonco told me a few days later. Let's hope that the ring rust has been knocked off. He will need it if he is to join stablemates Hekkie Budler and Moruti Mthalane at the very top of the sport.

★★★

Another Eastern Cape fighter plagued by inactivity in the past, lightweight Xolisani Ndongeni, stayed busy and moved his record to 25-0 (13 KOs) by stopping his outclassed Tanzanian opponent, Salimu Jengo, in four rounds. Ndongeni has the talent to be a top 10 contender and win a major belt, but he desperately needs to get a name opponent in the ring with him. Otherwise, "staying busy" will be as good as it gets.

★★★

There seems to be a mini-exodus of South African fighters moving to the U.S. lately.

Strawweight Deejay Kriel has relocated to Las Vegas to train with noted veteran coach Kenny Adams. What kind of fights the U.S. market has available for boxing's smallest men remains to be seen, but training with Adams can only do good.

Then there is the always in-shape, hard-grinding Chris van Heerden, who has made it through to the second round of the WBC's Jose Sulaiman Invitational welterweight tournament, outpointing once-beaten German Timo Schwarzkopf in April of this year in Louisville, Kentucky. He will now face fellow African Fredrick Lawson, from Ghana, on August 25 – in Toronto, Canada, of all places.

Hopefully good things will happen for these two.

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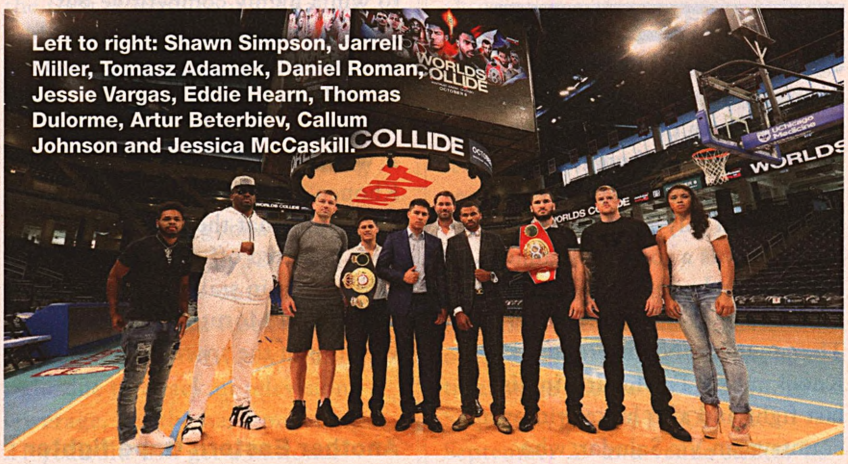

Left to right: Shawn Simpson, Jarrell Miller, Tomasz Adamek, Daniel Roman, Jessie Vargas, Eddie Hearn, Thomas Dulorme, Artur Beterbiev, Callum Johnson and Jessica McCaskill.

SEPTEMBER

SEPT. 14 – Jose Ramirez vs. Antonio Orozco, junior welterweights (for Ramirez's WBC title), Fresno, Calif. (ESPN, ESPN+)

SEPT. 15 – Gennady Golovkin vs. Canelo Alvarez, middleweights (for Golovkin's WBA and WBC titles), Las Vegas (HBO Pay-Per-View). Also fighting: Roman Gonzalez vs. Moises Fuentes, junior bantamweights.

SEPT. 22 – Anthony Joshua vs. Alexander Povetkin, heavyweights (for Joshua's IBF, WBA and WBO titles), London (DAZN, Sky Box Office).

SEPT. 24 – Sho Kimura vs. Kosei Tanaka, flyweights (for Kimura's WBO title), Nagoya, Japan.

SEPT. 28 – George Groves vs. Callum Smith, super middleweights (for vacant Ring and Groves' WBA title; World Boxing Super Series final), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (DAZN).

OCTOBER

OCT. 6 – Artur Beterbiev vs. Callum Johnson, light heavyweights (for Beterbiev's IBF title), Chicago (DAZN). Also fighting: Jessie Vargas vs. Thomas Dulorme, welterweights; Daniel Roman vs. Gavin McDonnell, junior featherweights (for Roman's WBA title); Jarrell Miller vs. Tomasz Adamek, heavyweights.

OCT. 13 – Zolani Tete vs. Mikhail Aloyan, bantamweights (for Tete's WBO title, WBSS quarterfinals), Ekaterinburg, Russia (DAZN).

OCT. 20 – Billy Joe Saunders vs. Demetrius Andrade, middleweights (for Saunders' WBO title), Boston (DAZN). Also fighting: Katie Taylor vs. Cindy Serrano, lightweights (for Taylor's IBF and WBA titles).

OCT. 27 – Daniel Jacobs vs. Sergiy Derevyanchenko, middleweights (for vacant IBF title), New York (HBO).

OCT. 27 – Regis Prograis vs. Terry Flanagan, junior welterweights (WBSS quarterfinals), New Orleans (DAZN).

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